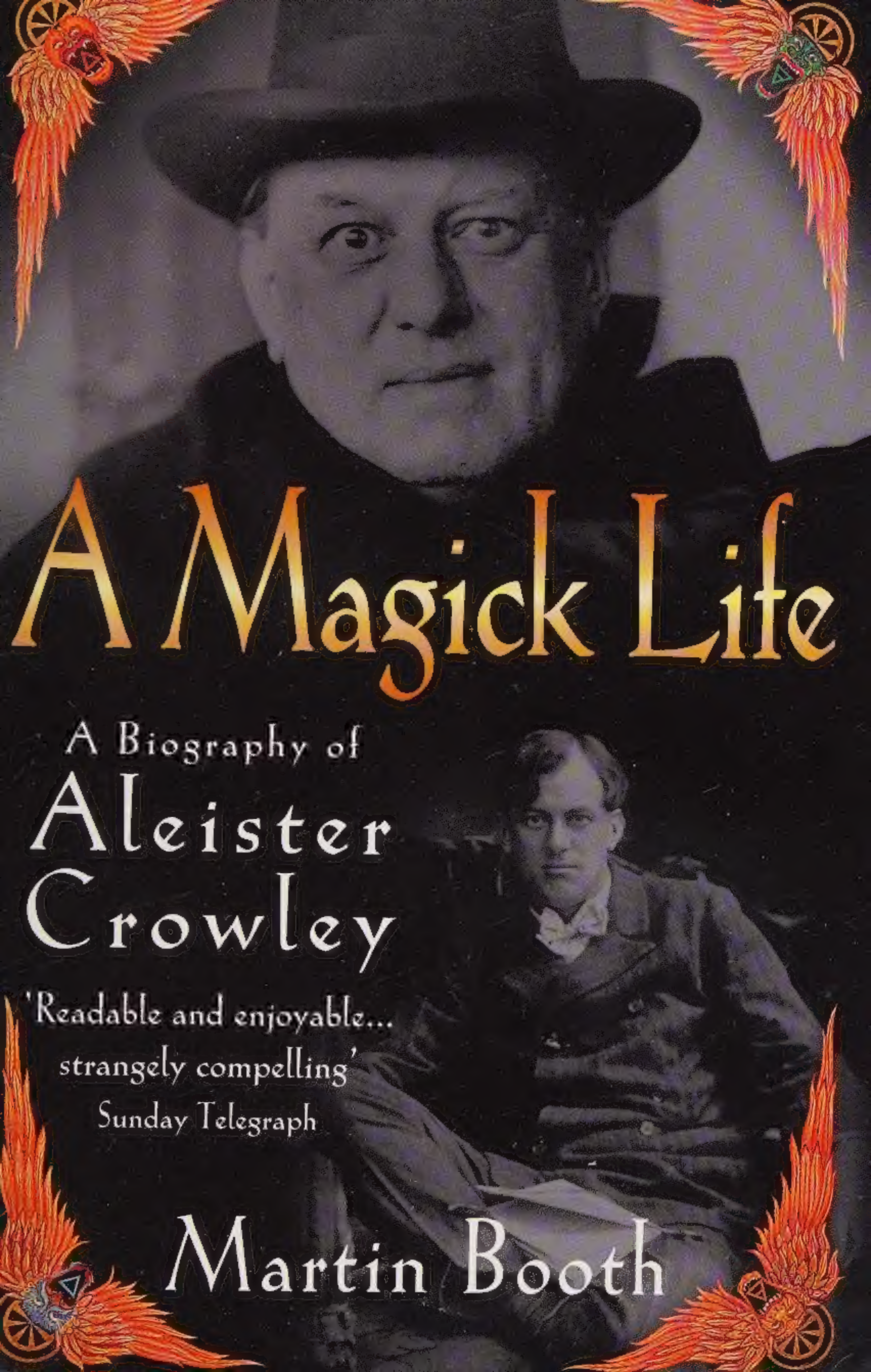

A Magick Life

A Biography of Aleister Crowley

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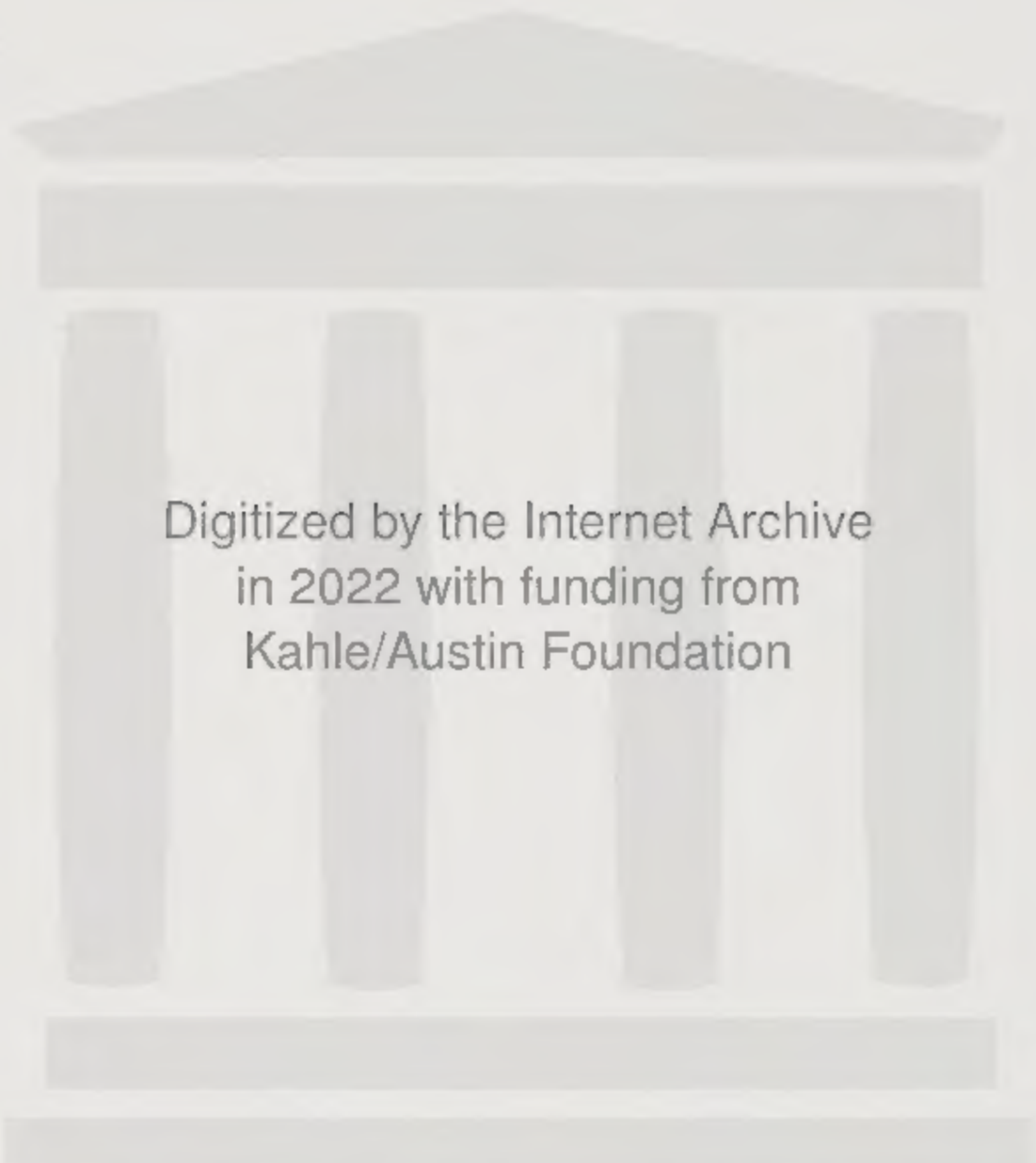
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Martin Booth

Martin Booth is internationally known as a novelist, biographer and non-fiction writer. His latest novel, *The Industry of Souls*, was short-listed for the 1998 Booker Prize whilst his non-fiction title, *The Dragon Syndicates*, a comprehensive study of Chinese organised crime, was short-listed for the 1999 Crime Writers' Association Golden Dagger Awards. His most recent biography is the highly acclaimed *The Doctor, The Detective and Arthur Conan Doyle*.

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A Magick Life

A Biography of Aleister Crowley

Martin Booth

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A Coronet Paperback

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Introduction

Embarking upon a biography of Aleister Crowley is a daunting task. From the very start, one is up against so many barriers.

Crowley was a complex polymath of a man who lived a mercurial life filled with a kaleidoscopic mixture of attitudes and agendas in a permanent state of flux, save for his one central ambition – that of being a magician who preached what he called the Law of Thelema. He was egotistical, ambitious and possessed a brilliant mind; highly educated and with a considerable intellect, he was also vain, selfish and, in many respects, remarkably naive. At the age of fifty, he admitted to himself in his diary that he felt he had never grown up. Tying him down is, to say the least, a challenge.

After coming to terms with Crowley's larger-than-life personality, one is faced with assessing the truth about him, dividing the fact from the fiction. Crowley himself embellished his own story although, to be fair, he was usually accurate about dates and places. Those who have followed his life have themselves twisted or adjusted it depending upon whether they have been a Crowley disciple or denigrator, have believed in or dismissed magic – or, as Crowley would have it, magick – and have liked or disliked him as a personality. Some have deliberately distorted the truth to put Crowley in a bad light while others have fed off previous studies and not questioned even the most outrageous details, resulting in disinformation being repeated and ultimately perpetuated.

This biography takes no partisan stand. It is neither a magical biography, concentrating upon Crowley's rituals and magical

achievements, nor is it one that seeks to belittle or undermine him. It merely presents the facts of his remarkable life, stripping away the myth and leaving the reader to decide whether Crowley was a sage and a seer, a charlatan and a very clever con man, a character with a true occult ability – however that may be defined – or simply an opportunist and a fake, as bogus as a spiritualist medium in a funfair sideshow. Whatever the case, and whatever opinion is arrived at, what cannot be dismissed is the fact that Crowley has not, as many predicted towards the end of his life and as he may well have anticipated himself, faded away into history. He now has many tens of thousands more followers than he ever had in his lifetime and is, courtesy of modern communications, more widely known of than he could ever have dreamed, but for which he had very much hoped.

Since Crowley's death in 1947, people have increasingly questioned the fundamentals of established religion, especially Christianity, and interest in the occult has consequently burgeoned, particularly in the Western world. Throughout the 1950s, this was a slow process, but it accelerated sharply in the 1960s when personal independence, individuality and liberalism were paramount, especially among educated young people. Crowley's philosophy, displaying contempt for orthodox religious belief and suggesting that individual ethics were more important than mass morality, was clearly going to be important to this new generation and struck a chord in the collective consciousness. Consequently, there was a resurgence of interest in him, aided in part by John Symonds' albeit unsympathetic and biased biography, *The Great Beast*.

As the Swinging Sixties progressed, sexual mores changed and drug use became more widespread in Western society, having previously been restricted to a small circle of bohemians and, particularly, artists and musicians. As the new social order established itself, it wanted spiritual leaders and found them in Aldous Huxley (who had experimented with various drugs in the 1930s and 1940s), in Timothy Leary (who experimented with LSD) and in Aleister Crowley, with his open minded attitudes towards sex

and drugs, especially the psychedelic compounds which promised mystical experiences rather than narcotised apathy.

In a short space of time, Crowley became a figure of importance to first the Beat then the Flower Power generations. His rebelliousness, dissension and creed of 'Do what thou wilt shall be the whole of the Law', which was, it must be admitted, misinterpreted by most as a licence to tune in and turn on to free love and hash cookies, seemed to offer a philosophy of liberty and hope. The Establishment still lambasted Crowley as 'the wickedest man in the world', but the underground press hailed him as 'the unsung hero of the hippies'.

Central to the rebellious nature of what was referred to as the alternative society were rock musicians. Young, often university-educated and intellectually curious, they took an interest in the occult and inevitably came across Crowley: he was, after all, arguably the most important occultist of the century. Yet he stood for more than an alternative lifestyle and religion. In him was manifest the rebellion many young people felt.

In 1967, at the height of the 'summer of love', the Beatles released the most influential rock album of the decade, *Sergeant Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band*. The album cover, designed by the artist Peter Blake, contained a montage of faces chosen by the Beatles, who had been experimenting with LSD to find spiritual enlightenment. In the montage with, among many others, Bob Dylan, Oscar Wilde, Lenny Bruce, H.G. Wells, the Marquis de Sade, Tony Curtis and Marilyn Monroe was Aleister Crowley. It was publicity like no other. With this endorsement by the Beatles, interest in Crowley soared out of the realm of those interested in the occult and into the public domain.

Two years later, the avant garde film director and Crowley acolyte Kenneth Anger rented Boleskine, once Crowley's home overlooking Loch Ness. The next year, when the house came on the market, Jimmy Page, the lead guitarist of the rock band Led Zeppelin, purchased it. Page, who has been fascinated by Crowley since the 1960s, has been a major collector of his works and now possesses what is considered the most comprehensive privately owned Crowley archive in existence. His interest goes

beyond collecting: he has owned an occult bookshop, published Crowley's work and composed a soundtrack for Kenneth Anger's film, *Lucifer Rising*. Through such connections, Crowley became even better known.

Other musicians became fascinated by Crowley. Graham Bond, who founded the Graham Bond Organisation in 1963 with the seminally influential John McLaughlin, Jack Bruce and Ginger Baker, believed he was Crowley's bastard son, his music influenced by Crowley's philosophy. (Bond and Crowley shared a faint facial resemblance but the chances of their being related were exceedingly thin.) Bond killed himself in May 1974 by throwing himself in front of an Underground train. The Rolling Stones were drawn to Crowley, a fact illustrated by the album *Their Satanic Majesties Request*. Mick Jagger came to know Kenneth Anger, who wanted to cast the singer as Lucifer (with Keith Richards as Beelzebub) in *Lucifer Rising*. Having been interested in fairies and magic, Jagger temporarily toyed with devil worship, offering to write the musical score for another of Anger's films, *Invocation of My Demon Brother*. In his song 'Quicksand' (1971), David Bowie included the lines 'closer to the Golden Dawn / immersed in Crowley's uniform of imagery.' Heavy metal bands picked up on Crowley. Ozzy Osbourne and the band Black Sabbath owed more than a passing debt to Crowley, while Iron Maiden released an album entitled *Best of the Beast*, with one of the tracks called 'The Number of the Beast.' This referred to Crowley's belief that he was the Beast 666 from the Bible. The punk rock bands of the 1970s paid lip-service to Crowley and his ideals. By 1985, Crowley had become a symbol of righteous moral opposition, an archetypal rebel.

Rock music aside, Crowley was for many years an icon. Fictional characters were based upon him and he was frequently to appear in fiction throughout the twentieth century. In Somerset Maugham's early novel, *The Magician*, he was the basis for Oliver Haddo. He also starred as Karswell in M.R. James's *Casting the Runes*, as Oscar Clinton in H. R. Wakefield's *He Cometh and He Passeth By*, as Apuleius Charlton in *A Black Solitude*, as Rowley Thorne in Manly Wade Wellman's Thorne stories, as Hugo

Astley in Dion Fortune's *The Winged Bull*, as Caradoc Cunningham in Colin Wilson's *Man without a Shadow*, as Dr Trelawney and Scorpio Murtlock in Anthony Powell's *Dance to the Music of Time* sequence of novels, as Mocata in Dennis Wheatley's *The Devil Rides Out*, as Theron Ware in James Blish's *Black Easter* and as Swaroff in Ethel Archer's *The Hieroglyph*, amongst others. In the 1970s, Snoo Wilson wrote a stage play, *The Beast*, which was put on by the Royal Shakespeare Company: it was revived and rewritten in the 1980s. In 1986, the Ballet Rambert staged a production called *Ceremonies* at Sadler's Wells, based upon rituals Crowley had investigated and upon which he had worked.

Crowley's own works, both literary and magical, which had hardly found a reader while he was alive, are now published as mass-market paperbacks. His complete autobiography – he referred to it as his autohagiography – was published in 1969 by Jonathan Cape under the title, *The Confessions of Aleister Crowley*. It has been in print ever since. His book *Magick* is considered the most important book on the subject of occult magic ever published. First editions of Crowley's books can be worth thousands of dollars: Crowley's signature in a book considerably boosts its value. A vast array of volumes on and about him have appeared in the last twenty years and there are more than 2,500 Internet websites concerning him and his work.

Detractors of Crowley put his continued appeal down to his 'wickedness', his reputation as an obsessive sexual deviant and devil worshipper: neither of these labels is accurate or even true in the light of modern times. Those who approach him in a more level-headed fashion can appreciate that Crowley is still remembered not just for his bisexuality, 'evil' or even his magic, but for the fact that he proposed a philosophy, albeit unworkable and most usually misinterpreted, which sought to raise human dignity in a dehumanised world against which he actively and dedicatedly resisted.

In short, Crowley was a characteristically unorthodox modern man for a dissenting, questioning modern world. His only trouble was that he was born half a century or so too early.

1

The Brother's Child

Where Aleister Crowley is concerned, the truth about his life is entangled with the mythology he sought, from his teenage years onwards, to weave about himself through a process of romanticism, fantasy, exaggeration and, on occasion, prevarication. Those who have over the years variously delved into his life have also had their own motives for hiding or twisting reality, either in order to make their subject seem heroic or to knock him off his pedestal. The result has been a convoluted and often puzzling legend; the truth is often just as elaborate and perplexing.

Throughout his life, Crowley claimed that his family was of Celtic origin, with roots sunk deep in the histories of Ireland and Brittany, although he preferred to be considered of Norman, not Irish, stock. The latter, he considered, was somewhat passé. His justification, such as it was, lay in the fact that O'Crowley was an Irish clan name in County Kerry, derived from the Gaelic and meaning 'descended from the Tough Hero', and de Quérouaille was a noble Breton family. The latter romantically included in its ranks Louise, one-time Duchess of Portsmouth, one of Charles II's mistresses and an ancestor of the present-day Dukes of Gordon, Lennox and Richmond. He further believed, with as little justification, that his forebears came to England at the time of Henry VII, a Crowley fighting with Henry Tudor at the Battle of Bosworth Field in 1485, rising from this to some position of status and respect. Certainly, by Elizabeth I's time, there was a Bishop Crowley. Furthermore, in the sixteenth century, there lived a minor preacher, thinker and divine called

Robert Crowley. Born in Gloucestershire, he was a dedicated Reformist who refused to preach or teach while dressed in what he referred to as popish clerical garb. There was Sir Ambrose Crowley, a seventeenth-century industrialist and one-time Sheriff of London. Other notable Crowleys were a nineteenth-century Irish painter, Nicholas Joseph Crowley, who lived in Dublin, and the insurrectionist Peter O'Neill Crowley, who lived in Cork. However, which - if any – of these illustrious personages was actually a predecessor of Aleister Crowley is open to debate, and the truth, so far as it can be proven, is very much more mundane: the English family name of Crowley, derived from the Old English and to be found mostly in Cheshire and Lancashire, means 'a clearing (or field) with crows'.

Edward Crowley, Aleister Crowley's father, was born in 1834, the younger son of the youngest son of a well-to-do Quaker family from Croydon, in south London. The family's wealth lay in the brewing of Crowley's Ales. The family had begun in the brewing business about 1600, owning a small brewery at Waddon, a hamlet just outside Croydon. For two centuries, they moderately prospered, as did thousands of other brewers. However, with the Industrial Revolution, the head of the family grew ambitious. In 1808, the family bought a brewery at 137/9 High Street, Croydon, then, in 1821, Edward Crowley's father purchased another, larger brewery in Turk Street, Alton, in Hampshire, which had been founded by James Baverstock in 1763. The family concern flourished until it was eventually sold in 1877: much later, in 1947, it was purchased by Watney's, by which time it owned 248 public houses. It ceased brewing in 1970.

Beer was not the Crowley family's sole business. They also maintained a number of franchised drinking shops, akin to present day wine bars, known as Crowley's Alton Alehouses. These were established in most large towns and cities across the south eastern quarter of England, especially in London, offering an attractive alternative to public houses for professional businessmen and their upwardly mobile white-collar staff. Selling sandwiches, potted meats, cheese, bread and pickles in addition to their own ale, they were, as Edmund Yates in his *Edmund Yates*

His Recollections and Experiences, published in 1884, stated, 'small shops fitted with a beer-engine and a counter ... They were enormously popular with young men who did not particularly care about hanging round the bars of taverns, and did an enormous trade.' Not only were they highly profitable but they allowed the Crowleys to break the monopoly which the cartel of bigger breweries applied to their tied public houses.

Little is known of Edward Crowley's education or early life but it was said he trained as an engineer, probably implying that he studied the mechanics of brewing. It has been assumed by some that he invented the 'beer-engine' Yates mentioned, yet this is a misconception: a beer-engine was the slang term for the ubiquitous hydraulic bar-room beer pump which was in widespread use long before Edward Crowley's birth. Upon his father's death, he took control of the family business, residing in Leamington Spa, near Warwick, where he was not far from his sister, Annie, who lived in nearby Coventry.

In November 1874, Edward Crowley married Emily Bertha Bishop. He was forty-five years old, she was twenty. The marriage took place in the Kensington registry office, in London, the bride's address being given as 71 Thistle Grove, West Brompton. The daughter of a farmer, she was a plain-looking woman with oriental features, resulting in her being called 'the little Chinese girl' at school. She was well educated and a talented watercolourist, which skill her son was later to remark was one of an 'admirable taste destroyed by academic training.'

Implying that he did not dirty his hands with trade or business, Edward Crowley referred to himself as a gentleman, the bulk of his earnings coming from dividends in the family businesses. Yet he did not live the life of the affluent entrepreneur or a rich man's prodigal son either. He and his wife were zealous Christians, members of the Protestant religious sect known as the Plymouth Brethren. Emily had, in fact, been brought up a strict Evangelist but, the wealthy bachelor Edward being considered quite a catch for a young girl, even if he was somewhat long in the tooth, she had converted to the Plymouth Brothers in order to gain his hand in marriage.

The Plymouth Brethren movement was founded by John Nelson Darby, a wealthy and well connected Irish scholar – he was named after Admiral Lord Nelson, a family friend – who, at twenty-four, gave up a promising legal career to be ordained a deacon in the Church of England. Accepting a curacy in a remote corner of County Wicklow in Ireland, he set about converting the local Roman Catholics to Protestantism, riding the countryside on horseback and preaching in the style of John Wesley. A serious fall from a bolting horse necessitated surgery in Dublin where, during his convalescence, Darby began to formulate his fundamentalist ideas in collaboration with a lapsed Roman Catholic medical student called Edward Cronin, whom it is likely was one of Darby's converts. During the winter of 1827/8, after less than three years as a priest, and disillusioned with the Church of England, Darby quit the established Church for a dissident group in Dublin, becoming its spiritual director. Setting out on an evangelical crusade financed by his wealth and followers, he travelled to England, where he met with particular success in Plymouth, the sect thereby gaining its popular name.

Darby was convinced that the established Anglican Church was decadent and needed guiding back towards the course of the true Christ. He believed implicitly that the Bible was the Word of God and anything other than a literal interpretation of it was a blasphemous corruption. As was not uncommon in the mid-nineteenth century, Darby believed that Christ's return was imminent and would establish a new, millennial kingdom.

Within a decade, the sect had over eight hundred members, the wealthy giving generously of both their time and money to the cause. Edward Crowley was one of these involved benefactors, his profound obsession to have a considerable effect upon his first-born child.

Emily Crowley gave birth to a son late in the evening of 12 October 1875 at home in 30 Clarendon Square, Leamington Spa. He was, according to his own description in later life, a remarkable infant with the three signs of a Buddha: he was tongue-tied, the attending doctor having to cut the *fraenum*

linguae, the thin web of skin beneath the tongue, to free it; a membrane restricted his foreskin, necessitating circumcision in his teens; and he exhibited on his chest, above his heart, 'four hairs curling from left to right in the exact form of a Swastika.' To what extent these claims are true or figments of Crowley's imagination, craving for publicity or sense of humour is debatable.

Soon after birth, the baby was baptised Edward Alexander, after his father and a pious family friend respectively. The ceremony, conducted according to the fashion of Plymouth Brethren, was, according to Crowley, one of his earliest memories. The baptism, he claimed to recall, took place in the bathroom on the first floor of the house in Clarendon Square. Dressed in a white baptismal robe, he was immersed into water as impressive words were spoken over him – the experience, he was sure, establishing his lifelong dislike of cold baths and love of poetry and rhetoric. The chances of his remembering the event are slim: high infant mortality in Victorian England demanded baptism within hours of birth.

More feasible are Crowley's memories of his early, sheltered and privileged childhood. He lived his first six years in Leamington Spa and could recall the house, its furnishings, country walks with his mother, a weir on the River Leam and a bout of bronchitis during which he was attended by a nurse and had a kettle steaming on the hob in his room. He remembered a summer holiday in the West Country, seeing ducks and pigs and falling off a pony to which he attributed a lifetime's uneasiness with horses. A near-accident in a carriage with a loose wheel made him cautious of riding in any vehicle of which he was not the driver. Other childhood problems were his failure to pronounce the letter *R* properly, his inability to hear soft sounds and a poor sense of smell. When he did not understand something or, as he put it, 'when silence seemed discretion', he would grimace.

Being an only child, Crowley was the centre of attention and, his parents socially keeping aloof because of religious attitudes, he lived in an adult environment and met grown-ups

more often than children. His first governess was a Miss Arkell, who wore black, had grey hair and bore 'traces of beard upon her large flat face'. Others he remembered being repulsed by were two old maids and Plymouth Sisters, Susan and Emma Cowper, whom he later unflatteringly described as looking like an overgrown radish and Tenniel's illustration of the Mock Turtle in *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*. His mother having told him that ladies did not have legs, for they wore long dresses as it was deemed improper to display them, Crowley decided to test the hypothesis. When the two Sisters next visited, he dived under the table to inspect their nether regions, returning with the pronouncement that neither were ladies as they had legs. In adult life, Crowley used this incident to prove the foundations of his logical, scientifically curious mind. On another occasion, on a country walk with his father, he was shown a bed of nettles and warned of their ability to sting. Crowley questioned his father, who asked him if he would rather believe in his word or learn by experience. Choosing the latter, Crowley ran into the nettles and was badly stung.

He was not to remain an only child, although his release from this state was transitory. In February 1880, his mother gave birth to a daughter, Grace Mary Elizabeth. The infant lived for just five hours.

Piety was the omphalos of Crowley family existence. The day began with prayers with the servants after which Bible passages were read by each person in turn. As a result, by the age of four, Crowley could read well and take his turn. The Bible was the only book he was permitted to read and he became fascinated by the intriguing names it contained, but admitted that neither the narrative nor the poetry impressed him. His curiosity was aroused, however, by prophecies and the descriptive passages of the Revelation of St John the Divine. Needless to say, his reading imbued him with a powerful awareness of the apocalypse, the road to salvation through the teachings of the Plymouth Brethren, the terrible iniquities of sin, the horrors of eternal damnation and the surety of death.

In 1881, Edward Crowley sold the house in Leamington Spa

and the family moved to The Grange, a substantial, three-storey property with a large, sylvan garden overlooking the main road running between Redhill and Merstham in Surrey. It was to be their home for five years, in Crowley's memory a perpetually happy period.

Once settled in The Grange, Crowley's formal education began. His father, rather than sending him to a local or nearby public school where he might receive the 'wrong kind' of religious education, employed private tutors. A cousin six years Crowley's senior, Gregor Grant, frequently visited and became Crowley's hero: quite why he was permitted to visit is a puzzle for he was raised a Presbyterian and therefore definitely not in sympathy with the Plymouth Brethren's ways. All Crowley's other playmates were the offspring of Brethren, considered by his parents to be safe. Alick, as Crowley was known in the family, nevertheless indulged himself in the usual pranks of boyhood. He and his Brethren friends lay in wait in woods at the end of the garden to tease local schoolchildren, referring to them as 'cads', firing on them with peashooters. On one occasion, they attacked a navvy working across the road, belabouring him with sticks in the belief that he was a villain in a game they were playing.

This puerile mischief was not restricted to outdoor pursuits. Edward Crowley held regular tea and prayer sessions in his house: Crowley referred to these in his autobiographical writing as Brethren's tea-fights at which, 'when the physical animal was satisfied, there would be a debauch of spiritual edification'. At one, Crowley put castor oil in a silver tea urn; the guests were too polite to comment upon the foul taste. At another, he and several friends concentrated on plying one guest, a gluttonous Mrs Musty, with food, thereby holding up the start of the prayer session by an hour. As with the castor oil episode, no one complained owing, Crowley believed, to the Plymouth Brethren's characteristic meekness and hesitancy, which he considered a weakness.

Not all the adults Crowley met were pious zealots whose only interests were pastries followed by prayers. A tailor named Hemming, a Plymouth Brother who made Edward Crowley's

suits, taught him to play chess. Crowley soon mastered the game and devised his own game plans. It was not long before Hemming was hard pressed to win a game and Crowley was, according to his memory, not to meet his match until 1895, when he entered university.

Twice during the years at The Grange, Crowley went away on holiday, including his first visit overseas to France and Switzerland, in 1883. His recollections of it comprised images of cities and of being woken before dawn to observe an artificially lit waterfall and the sun rising from a platform on the Rigi-Kulm. Of his other trip, to the Scottish Highlands, he chose to remember little.

While Crowley may have claimed happy memories of his Surrey days, his upbringing was austere and fairly rigid. On top of the usual strictures of Victorian middle-class values came the added stringency of fanatical religion. In his own words, 'The underlying theory of life which was assumed in the household showed itself constantly in practice.' Like children of the hippie era a century later, he lived in a semi-closed religious vacuum populated by self-obsessed, self-assured and arrogant people. Honorifics were discarded as only Christ could issue them, all men being equal in the eyes of God. Brethren referred to each other as Saint, so certain were they of having achieved salvation: everyone else was a Sinner. Their way was God's way and they brooked no interference, criticism or contrary opinion. They composed their own prayers, considering the Lord's Prayer a meaningless incantation. Christmas, considered a pagan festival, was not celebrated: any Christmas cards received were burnt, no decorations were hung, no trees erected and no presents exchanged. In essence, the Brethren knew, with the divine certainty of the religious bigot, that the Bible was inspired by the Holy Ghost, other Christian Churches were corrupted into the 'synagogues of Satan' and everyone except themselves was heading for fire and brimstone as surely as the sun set.

Throughout his formative years, Crowley was inculcated with the belief that anyone who worshipped alternatively to a Plymouth Brother did so out of a desire to be wicked. Not

surprisingly, he lived in fear and trepidation of sin. On one occasion, this manifested itself in a moment of terror. After playing in the garden, he returned indoors to find the house empty. This terrified him: the Second Coming of Christ being considered imminent in the Crowley household, he thought Christ had finally arrived, taking everyone away but forgetting him. Inevitably, this family atmosphere distorted his outlook and character for life.

Edward Crowley did more than hold prayer sessions at home. He also wrote, edited, financed and published religious tracts which he distributed, either in person in the street or by mail. One of these was a postcard entitled *Poor Anne's Last Words*. Anne, a servant of Crowley's grandfather, had died delirious, her last contrite words, that she was lost, impressing themselves upon Edward Crowley, who was captivated by death. A pamphlet he wrote in 1865 was entitled *The Plymouth Brethren (so Called), Who They Are – Their Creed – Mode of Worship – etc.* Produced in Paternoster Row, the printing district of London, it cost a penny and prophesied the collapse of the established Christian Church and the arrival of the Antichrist.

Not content with publishing the Brethren's creed, Edward Crowley also preached it. While living in Leamington Spa, he frequently walked through the Warwickshire countryside, accosting passers-by, evangelising in village streets and knocking on doors to hand out tracts or offer salvation. Later, he did the same across the Surrey countryside. On occasion, his son accompanied him, observing him as he 'would engage likely strangers in conversation, diagnose and prescribe for their spiritual diseases, inscribe them in his address books, and correspond and send religious literature for years.' At times, Edward Crowley was more devious with his targets. Crowley recorded how he

> *would notice somebody cheerfully engaged in some task and ask sympathetically its object. The victim would expand and say that he hoped for such and such a result. He was now in a trap. My father would say, 'And then?' By repeating this question, he would*

ferret out the ambition of his prey to be mayor of his town or whatnot, and still came the inexorable 'And then?' till the wretched individual thought to cut it short by saying as little uncomfortably as possible, 'Oh well, by that time I shall be ready to die.' More solemnly than ever came the question, 'And then?' In this way my father would break down the entire chain of causes and bring his interlocutor to realise the entire vanity of human effort.

With considerable, embittered irony, Crowley later summed up his father's preaching as being 'the only logical occupation for a humane man who believed that even the noblest and best of mankind were doomed to eternal punishment.'

One day, a woman called at The Grange seeking a subscription in aid of British soldiers fighting in Egypt. Edward Crowley lambasted her with, as Crowley put it, a 'philippic on "bibles and brandy."' Part of his anger illogically lay in the fact that he had little time for teetotallers, whom he accused of trying to get to heaven by good deeds rather than Christian living. When he announced to a congregation in Reigate town hall that he would prefer to preach to a thousand drunks than a thousand abstainers, he was heckled for his association with Crowley's Ales. His retort was he had been an abstainer for years, even though his family ran a brewery, but now drank, for he saw no mention of prohibition in the Bible.

As a child, Crowley respected and admired his father. He admitted to him being 'his hero and his friend, though, for some reason or other, there was no real conscious intimacy or understanding', a man 'of strong common sense [who] never allowed his religion to interfere with natural affection.' He did not fully accept his father's narrow viewpoint on life but did feel 'his integrity was absolute' and summed him up as a man who, though 'wrong-headed as he was, had humanity and a certain degree of common-sense: he had a logical mind and never confused spiritual with material issues.' Where his mother was concerned, however, Crowley's feelings were at odds with those he experienced towards his father. He disliked her, claiming in adulthood a physical repulsion for her, stating that

she was socially beneath her husband. Even so, she played an important part in his life and was as dominant an influence as his father, if in a negative manner. Perhaps because he knew of no viable alternative, Crowley became in a childish fashion a Plymouth Brother himself.

For all the religious zeal and comparative social solitude of his first eight years, Crowley's childhood was not unduly abnormal for the time. His parents were attentive, albeit to his potential for sin as much as his need for love, yet they were also at times distant and uncomprehending. Nevertheless, his life was materially secure and financially safe, and he was somewhat indulged: as Crowley liked eating roast turkey, the family provided him with a 'christmas' dinner on Christmas Eve or Boxing Day to make up for the fact he would not be getting one on Christmas Day. Certainly, he was not as repressed as he would later like people to think. The all-pervasive Christianity did not irk him, although he conceded in adulthood that 'his sympathies were with the opponents of heaven', a stand which was to become central to his life.

This begs the question why Crowley later became so ardently anti-Christian. Paradoxically, the truth lies in Christianity itself and his early knowledge of the Bible. Without access to other, more mind-broadening books, his imagination was fed only by the scriptures, stressing the terrors of damnation, the evils of sin and the corruption of the religious body politic. His mind was filled not with *Boy's Own* ripping yarns and childhood fairytales but stories involving the False Prophet, the Scarlet Woman and, perhaps beyond all these, the Beast with the number 666. As would any child, he found these characters exciting and enticing. In addition, nurtured by the air of godliness in his family life, Crowley's character was starting to form in ways others might regard, especially today, as unhealthily biased and narrow.

The Plymouth Brethren's piety was such that any sin was sure to be met with significant punishment. This penalty was not merely intended to teach the sinner a lesson: his acceptance of it was also a path to redemption. Castigation was considered a necessary part of the process of submission to God and

something not to be feared but regarded as an essential part of religious development. In short, punishment took you nearer to your god. Crowley, therefore, came from an early age to accept pain as a part of life. He subsequently admitted to possessing 'a strain of congenital masochism.'

Apart from the Bible and other religious tomes, one book the family possessed was a history of the Indian Mutiny, an event still very much alive in the public consciousness and imbued with Christian values and morals. The Victorian perception of the uprising was filled with images of good Christians standing up before the heathen hordes to face their martyrdom with stoic pride. Crowley loved this book, identifying with some of the characters: these were not, however, brave Raj officers but their attackers. He regretted the death of Nana Sahib and wished he could have helped in his torturing yet, at the same time, suffered at his hands. In a Mutiny game played with Gregor Grant, in which Crowley was Tipu Sahib, he asked his cousin to be cruel to him. Visions of blood and torture excited him. Pain was beautiful, agony and degradation thrilling. The seeds for his, as he put it, 'phantasy of desiring to be hurt' were firmly planted.

At the age of eight, Crowley was sent to boarding school. A podgy boy who had led a sheltered life, he was unversed in the ways of his peers and unmercifully bullied. Indeed, as so often happens to children who are somehow out of the ordinary, he was tormented and victimised throughout most of his school years.

His first school was run by an elderly, strict, evangelical schoolmaster called H.T. Habershon, who, with his two sons, owned the White Rock Boarding School for Young Gentlemen in White Rock Gardens, Hastings. Before departing, Edward Crowley took his son aside and read to him from Genesis, chapter nine, the story of Noah's naked drunkenness, intending this to be a veiled warning against the evils of the flesh, particularly masturbation and homosexual congress: the former was considered particularly sinful, an abuse of the temple of the body and likely to lead to madness, blindness and, if you were

a Plymouth Brother, eternal damnation. With a final warning that he should never allow anyone to touch his genitalia, father and son parted.

Crowley attended the Habershons' school for about two largely uneventful years, the climax of which, for Crowley, was the headmaster's death. Having been beaten by Habershon for insolently answering an examination question, he concentrated on willing the old man's demise. When, a short time later, he actually died, Crowley believed he had been successful.

In 1885, Crowley was moved to a preparatory school in Cambridge, the principal of which was a former Anglican priest turned Plymouth Brother, the Rev. Henry d'Arcy Champney. Born in York in 1854 and ordained in 1878, he was a graduate of Corpus Christi College, Cambridge. After four years, during which he was a priest in Ely and curate of the church of St Andrew's the-Less in Cambridge, he turned his back on Anglicanism and established his school at 51 Bateman Street, to cater for the sons of Brethren. Where Edward Crowley was zealous, Champney was fanatical. A sexually ambiguous sadomasochist, he revelled in giving and receiving pain for the cleansing of the soul, his mania such that he once spoilt his ballot papers in a national election by writing 'I vote for King Jesus' across them. According to Crowley, he proudly admitted to him one day that he had never consummated his marriage although, as Crowley put it, he phrased the information somewhat more crudely. Champney was a shock to Crowley, who, until now, had assumed all Plymouth Brethren were like his father, holy in thought, clean of speech and honourable of deed.

Perhaps as a reaction to Champney's attitudes, Crowley decided – for the moment – to follow in his father's path. In his early days at the school, he wrote a letter home, addressing it to 'Dear Papa & Mama', reporting how he was presented with a penknife as the prize for handing in the best holiday work, how the playground surface caved in and how the school boiler nearly blew up: he went on to request some money to buy fireworks and ended with 'I have joined a sort of band of chaps, who are with God's

blessing, going to try & help others & speak to them about their souls.'

Crowley may have had no option but to join, for this evangelical group seems to have been a compulsory activity. After morning prayers and a religious instruction meeting lasting up to two hours, the boys went to a public sermon given by Champney on Parker's Piece, a grassy common in Cambridge. This was followed by individual silent reading from the Bible or another permitted and morally approved book after which there was a voluntary prayer meeting no one dared miss. The day ended with evening prayer, more preaching (some in public) and prayers before bed. Every Monday they held a 'Badgers' Meeting' when, as Crowley put it, 'the scourings of Barnswell', one of the slum areas of Cambridge, were taken in, fed and preached to. The result of this charity was periodic epidemics of ringworm, measles and mumps among the pupils. Champney blamed these on the boys' sinfulness.

Despite Champney and his foibles, Crowley had a productive time in his charge. He was liked by his fellow pupils and bullied less than he had been previously. He excelled at his studies and won a prize, a copy of Gilbert White's *A Natural History of Selborne*. Although he later professed to never bothering to read it, he certainly read a good many other books at the school. He discovered poetry through a Plymouth Brethren hymn-book, the works of Sir Walter Scott and John Milton, and it was not long before he attempted writing verse in which he explored his awakening sexuality. It seems his father's warning had fallen on deaf ears as a fair percentage of it leant towards the homosexual.

His horizons were widening, but Crowley was soon to undergo a profound change of fortune. In May 1886, he was suddenly summoned home from school. His father had fallen ill, and his presence was required at the prayer meeting aimed at petitioning Jesus Christ for a cure. Cancer of the tongue was diagnosed and Edward Crowley was referred to Sir James Paget, Vice-Chancellor of the University of London and one of the foremost surgeons of the day, having been made a baronet as one

of Queen Victoria's private doctors. He counselled immediate surgery but Edward Crowley was terrified that surgery would impair his speech – it would almost certainly have done so, if it did not in fact strike him mute – and thereby inhibit his preaching. Instead, he underwent a course of Count Mattei's electro-homoeopathy.

The nearest practitioner of this quackery lived in Southampton, so the family moved there, taking a house called Glenburnie. From here, Edward Crowley attended a surgery for treatment consisting of a potion of herbs, an injection of morphine and the application of electrodes to the tumour.

There was no scientific basis to the treatment, which was predictably ineffective. Edward Crowley died on 5 March 1887. The family and their immediate circle of Brethren were shocked. The cancer had caused no pain and everyone had been optimistic, between their ardent prayers and the therapy, that the disease would be cured. Crowley, back in Cambridge, claimed he dreamed of his father's death the night before receiving the news.

In his self proclaimed hagiography, *The Confessions of Aleister Crowley*, which chronicles his life to 1923, Crowley refers to himself in the third person until the moment of his father's death, whereafter he writes in the first. It was as if, with his father's death, Crowley became an individual, a freethinker released from the chains of his upbringing.

Not only was he set free, but he experienced a seminal character change. Before his father's death, Crowley had been somehow held back. He respected and admired his father, and did not want to go against him, yet once he was dead, Crowley felt at liberty to do what he wanted, set out on his own life's journey unencumbered by paternal baggage.

His new found independence first manifested itself at Champney's school, where he began to kick against the traces. He started to question the Bible and appreciate the hypocrisy exhibited by Champney and his religion, which he now saw not as a just religion but one in which lying and deceit were tolerated if they meant bringing a sinner, actual or alleged, to his knees.

In an autobiographical section entitled 'A Boyhood in Hell', included in his *The World's Tragedy*, published privately in Paris in 1910, Crowley gives a view of his time at Champney's school. Once he had started to question the world about him, he wrote,

> *It was a good enough school from the point of examiners, I dare say. Morally and physically it was an engine of destruction and corruption*
>
> *We were allowed to play Cricket, but not to score runs, lest it should excite the vice of 'emulation' . hypocrisy and sneaking were the only virtues* [and] *the informer was always believed implicitly as against probability, or even possibility, with complete disregard of the testimony of other and independent witnesses For instance, a boy named Glascott, with insane taint, told Mr Champney that he had visited me (12 years old) at my mother's house during the holidays true so far, he had – and found me lying drunk at the bottom of the stairs My mother was never asked about this, nor was I told of it. I was put into 'Coventry' i.e nor master nor boy might speak to me, or I to them I was fed on bread and water, during playhours I worked in the schoolroom; during work-hours I walked solitary round and round the playground I was expected to 'confess' the crime of which I was not only innocent, but unaccused This punishment went on for a term and a half.*

Sneaks, it might be added, were regarded as 'instruments of the Lord Jesus' and boys ratted on their peers to gain favour with Champney and his masters. Beatings were commonplace. 'I remember,' Crowley recorded, 'one licking I got – on the legs, because flogging the buttocks excites the victim's sensuality! 15 minutes prayer, 15 strokes of the cane, 15 minutes more prayer, 15 more strokes – and more prayer to top it!'

The years 1886 and 1887 were an unhappy watershed in Crowley's life. He lost his father, his happy boyhood home at Redhill and his faith in what he had until now believed. He was unsettled, directionless now his mentor was gone. Crowley's

relationship with his mother, always fractious, became more so, exacerbated by the fact that, after Edward Crowley's death, she found herself alienated from his family, which had never shared his religious zeal. Even the Plymouth Brethren, who had regarded her husband as a spiritual force, no longer visited her. Feeling cast off, afraid and with an increasingly rebellious and antagonistic son, she moved to London to be near her own family and the only man upon whom she felt she could rely for support. This was her brother, Tom Bond Bishop.

It is fair to assume that Emily Crowley saw her brother as more than moral support. In him, she hoped she might find a surrogate father for her intransigent son. She could not have been more wrong.

Bishop lived in the well-to do suburb of South Kensington, in what is today Drayton Gardens. Whether or not Emily and her son permanently moved in with him is unclear, but it is unlikely for, after her husband's death, she was restless and did not settle in one place for long. During the school holidays, Crowley stayed with Bishop or travelled the country with his mother, staying in hotels and boarding houses. Only later, when Bishop moved to Streatham, did Emily Crowley settle down, living first in a house called Oakview in Polworth Road before moving, in 1896, to a second house, Coire-na-Creich, in nearby Rulford Road.

Although not a Plymouth Brother, Bishop was not far off their religious mark. A civil servant in Her Majesty's Customs and Excise, he was an evangelical Anglican well known throughout London as the philanthropic founder of the Children's Scripture Union and the Children's Special Service Mission. Crowley took an instant dislike to him, probably with ample justification, for Bishop was an intellectually clever bigot who, Crowley considered, 'obeyed blind savage impulses and took them for the sanctions of the Almighty.' He went on to vilify Bishop's two children's Christian organisations: 'The former dictates to children what passages of the Bible they shall read daily: the latter drags them from their play at the seaside and hands them over to the ravings of pious undergraduates

or hired gospel-geysers.' Bishop was, furthermore, a man for whom wickedness and the conquering of it were his life's work. Certainly, he put more effort into combating sin than smuggling: he never attained significant promotion in the civil service, directing all his ambition towards the furtherance of his, and others', souls. In summation, he was a bully, a petty, insignificant public servant with a religious chip on his shoulder. However, despite Crowley's later fulminations, Bishop appears to have been little more than a typical repressed Victorian dogmatist.

The arrival of Uncle Tom Bishop in his life was a shock for Crowley. He had lost his father, who was just and fair, only to have him replaced by a cruel fanatic. It is reasonable to say that, in the modern sense of the word, Crowley was abused, at least psychologically or emotionally, by Bishop. The man's narrow-minded intransigence in all matters, his life being entirely ruled by his own interpretation of Christianity, was oppressive in the extreme, especially to the rebel in his nephew. Although he had a weak sense of humour, Bishop was otherwise without mirth: laughter, for him, was not next to godliness.

Also living with Bishop was Aunt Ada, who was Emily Crowley's sister, Grandmother Bishop and an assortment of other relatives. Crowley liked his aunt, although she was entirely under Bishop's thumb, sharing his religious opinions in order to have a quiet life and acting as secretary to the Children's Scripture Union. She was kind but in frail health, and died young. Grandmother Bishop, Crowley's maternal grandfather's second wife, was an elderly, distinguished lady at odds with her son's religiosity. She was a keen bezique player, but he regarded playing-cards as the Devil's picture books, forbidding them in the house. Ada camouflaged a pack by painting the suits as flowers so she and the old lady could play. Anne, a daughter by the grandfather's first marriage, lived with them, as did her brother, John. Anne was a particularly unattractive woman in late middle age who went to bed nightly with a bottle of stout which she referred to as her baby. John, who had emigrated to Australia, made and then lost his fortune through ill health and

been reduced to living off his half-brother's charity, was obliged to smoke his pipe out of Bishop's sight and put up with his perpetual preaching. Crowley liked John and was sympathetic about the religious hectoring he also suffered. When Crowley was fifteen, John confessed to him that he feared he was not at peace with Christ. Crowley responded that Christ was a myth, sin did not exist and he was lucky to have lived so long out of Bishop's reach. John, his health already weak, suffered a nervous breakdown and died some years later. Crowley subsequently accused his mother and her brother of murder.

Although the 'dinginess of my uncle's household, the atmosphere of severe disapproval of the universe in general, and the utter absence of the spirit of life, combined to make me detest my mother's family', Crowley's detestation was as nothing compared to that he felt for his mother. After Edward Crowley's death, her religious mania increased. Wrapped in the black, self-pitying folds of Victorian widowhood, she started to criticise the world for its wickedness. She declared, for example, that God was jealous of Brunel's steamship, the *Great Eastern*, in the way he had been of the Tower of Babel, and this was the cause of the repeated problems the vessel faced. She refused, as a Plymouth Sister, to set foot in a church, even to attend Aunt Ada's funeral: she remained outside in pouring rain but did concede to attend the interment.

When not fulminating against society, she turned her frequently venomous tongue on her son. Crowley could do little right. He revolted against her religious principles which, as he grew older, he openly scorned. Yet Crowley felt some sympathy for her: 'her powerful natural instincts [he wrote] were suppressed by religion to the point that she became, after her husband's death, a brainless bigot of the most narrow, illogical and inhuman type . . . In a way, my mother was insane, in the sense that all people are who have watertight compartments to the brain, and hold with equal passion incompatible ideas, and hold them apart lest their meeting should destroy both.' In other words, he regarded her as a soul ensnared and blinded by its faith, but he did once allow that she had been 'the best of

all possible mothers, only marred beyond belief by the religious monomania which perhaps started in what one may call "hysteria of Widowhood."'

It was during one of her fits of pique at Crowley's behaviour that she cast into his mind a thought which was to become central to his entire life. How it exactly came about is not known but, at some stage, she started referring to him as 'the beast'. Probably, at first, this was merely a name born out of a moment of frustration, but it became exaggerated after Crowley's father's death, especially when mother and son were living in or near a family for which every commonplace action and word could have a religious connotation. The boy who had a beastly manner metamorphosed into the Beast of chapter thirteen of the Revelation in which St John the Divine saw 'a beast rise up out of the sea, having seven heads and ten horns, and upon his horns ten crowns and upon his heads the name of blasphemy . . . Let him, that hath understanding count the number of the beast: for it is the number of a man: and his number is six hundred threescore and six.' Gradually, his mother started to convince herself that Crowley 'was actually Antichrist of the Apocalypse . . . her poor lost erring son who might yet repent and be redeemed by the Precious Blood.' Crowley, the idea set, decided he was the Beast and accepted the position's responsibility, even stating in adulthood that his mother, brainless bigot as she was, had been inspired when she thus named him and set him on his life's course.

With his new 'identity', Crowley's recalcitrance was joined. He took every opportunity to criticise, deride and undermine Christianity and, especially, the Plymouth Brethren, whom he accused of causing his father's death by counting on prayer and quackery rather than the expertise of the Queen's own surgeon. He attacked the Brethren for their hypocrisy, illogical inconsistencies, bigotry and self righteous arrogance. 'Whilst an irreligious man [Crowley wrote] may have moral checks; a Plymouth Brother has none. He is always ready to excuse the vilest crimes by quoting the appropriate text and invoking the name of Christ to cover every meanness which may delight his

vain and vicious nature.' Their principles, he considered, were stupid, and he recounted how his father refused to purchase stock in railway companies because there were no trains in the Bible. The practice of finding a biblical quotation to support every action was interpreted by Crowley as meaning the Bible could be twisted to justify whatever one wanted. The Holy Bible became the Holy Excuse, the Divine Permission which, ultimately, meant you could do what you wanted and get away with it.

His mutiny against the Brethren called for extreme, and in some cases ironic, methods. Knowing the Brethren's belief in their exclusivity, he attended Anglican and Roman Catholic churches – after all, they were regarded by the Plymouth Brethren as dens of iniquity. Yet he found no wickedness there. They were, he deduced, all 'tarred with the same brush; they were cold, heartless, dull, stupid, vapid and fatuous. The emotionalism of some and the sacramentalism of others seemed to me perfectly insincere.' The Church of England was even more hypocritical than the Brethren because it was, in his opinion, 'simply a machine for keeping the lower classes in their proper place.'

Now set on opposing God, whom he considered his enemy, Crowley decided he wished to sin. Educated to believe spiritual sin was beyond forgiveness, he opted for more than a mere civil or moral misdemeanour. If, he reasoned, he committed sins that could never be forgiven, then even if, as his mother opined, he was predestined to be saved, he could not be, and this was to be his ambition. As the Beast, he reasoned the best spiritual sin he could commit was to worship the Devil, and so he became a Satanist, praying secretly for Satan to protect him from his pious mother, Uncle Tom, Champney and anyone else who upset him.

That said, the youthful Satanist was not all he claimed. Until he was nineteen, Crowley was writing poetry in the form of hymns. It was more as if he were beginning to devise his own internalised theology. Certainly, he was of the opinion it was hypocrisy he objected to, not religion *per se*. He summed his

ambiguity up with the statement 'I did not hate God or Christ, but merely the God and Christ of the people whom I hated' and it was only later in life that he considered the Bible fully supported hypocrisy and specifically set himself against it.

Bishop's psychological and Champney's physical cruelty exacerbated Crowley's sadomasochistic tendencies. When he was fourteen, having heard that a cat had nine lives, he set out to prove the hypothesis. He caught a cat, dosed it with arsenic, chloroformed it, gassed it, stabbed it, caved its skull in, slit its throat, set light to it, drowned it and dropped it from a window. The theory was disproved.

By his mid-teens, his intelligence already evident to others, Crowley came to consider himself, if not a genius, then well on the way to becoming one. His intellectual curiosity verged on the insatiable, no doubt honed by his questioning of religious overtones at home and school. He assessed himself in these terms: 'The combination of innocence, ignorance, knowledge, ingenuity and high moral principle seems extraordinary. It is evident that the insanely immoral superstition in which I had been brought up is responsible for so atrocious an absurdity. Again and again we shall see how the imposition of the anti-natural theory and principles of Christianity upon a peculiarly sane, matter-of fact, reality-facing genius created a conflict whose solution was expressed on the material plane by some extravagant action.' Of which the cat was but an early example. Crowley was to develop into a person forever pushing at the boundaries of experience, reacting to emotions and impulses rather than reason.

His defiance of religion caused the Crowley family some concern, and Jonathan Crowley, his father's elder brother, was called upon to see what influence he might have on the boy. A good-looking and charismatic man, Jonathan Crowley had not shared his brother's religious views. He lived with his second wife and two children he had had by his first wife: he had married his children's governess, an act which not only indicated a willingness not to conform to the mores of the time but also implied his humanity. Compared to

the other men in Crowley's life, Uncle Jonathan was almost normal.

Jonathan Crowley and his wife visited their nephew at school in Cambridge, where they found matters not to their liking. They disapproved of the 'Badgers' Meetings', Jonathan Crowley threatening to bring in the public health official if Champney did not desist in holding them. Champney acquiesced. At the same time, he saw through the schoolmaster, realised that Crowley was being ill-treated, and applied to the courts to have the boy made a ward of Chancery. Crowley was summoned before a judge in chambers - a Mr Justice Stirling - but was so afraid his mother might be sent to jail that he lied and professed he was happy at Champney's academy.

On his return to school, he was inevitably punished for rocking Champney's educational boat. Put on reduced rations and forbidden to speak to anyone – or for them to communicate with him - he came home for the holidays weak and ill. His mother, in one of her more sympathetic moments, put aside her concerns about having nurtured the Beast and ordered Champney to Streatham. Champney came. Crowley was dumbstruck in his presence and dared not deny whatever Champney accused him of, none of the accusations being too specific. The result was that Crowley was sent back to the school the next term.

Uncle Tom Bishop, however, had smelt a rat. He travelled to Cambridge. Champney was ready for him. Crowley was coached before his uncle arrived. When Champney accused the boy of various crimes Crowley, however, refused to confess to them and declared himself not only innocent but also ignorant of the charges. Bishop realised that Champney was fabricating the crimes, accused the headmaster of lunacy and withdrew Crowley from the school. Champney was now the object of official observation. His character was deemed unsuitable for the running of a school and it was closed. The last he was heard of was in 1899 when, impoverished, he applied for aid under the Clerical Disabilities Act.

By now, the boy who had been a happy, healthy child during

his father's life was reduced to a wan, withdrawn, sick youth. A doctor diagnosed Crowley as suffering from albuminuria, a kidney malfunction caused by hypertension and recognised by increased urinary albumin excretion. The prognosis was that, without immediate attention, Crowley would die in a matter of months. He was immediately placed upon a special diet and prescribed, in true Victorian fashion, lots of exercise in the countryside.

For part of the time, Crowley was well enough to attend a local school, and was enrolled as an occasional day-boy at Streatham College, overlooking Streatham Common, run by a master called Thomas Augustus Yarrow. Here he attended the usual academic courses, but was to discover what he considered the spiritual sin for which he had been searching, by which he might earn his 'diabolical V.C.'. It was masturbation.

He had heard of it from a boy called Gibson at Champney's, but no one there had dared instruct him in the process, although he was, he wrote, 'on fire in every nerve to learn the practice that people made so much fuss about' and soon 'applied myself with characteristic vigour to its practice.'

His choice of masturbation as a door to unequivocal damnation was reasoned. Sexual congress was natural and therefore, though sinful outside wedlock, not really a class A act of wickedness. Drinking alcohol could not be sinful as his father had drunk wine and beer: on the other hand, smoking might be for his father had abjured tobacco. Consequently, Crowley masturbated and smoked whenever he could.

Never at a loss when presented with a chance to snipe at his uncle's high moral stand, Crowley was often quick and witty. On one occasion, Tom Bishop wrote an uplifting article for the *Boys' Magazine*, entitled 'The Two Wicked Kings'. These ogres, who ruined young lads' lives, were named Smo-King and Drin King. Crowley, on reading the article, asked why his uncle had omitted the most depraved king of them all. Bishop could not think which monarch he had overlooked. Crowley put him right. History does not record if the missing king was Fuc-King or Wan-King.

Crowley also travelled, over the next year or so, through Britain with a succession of tutors, taking the country air by hillwalking in Wales, Scotland and the north of England. The tutors, vetted by Tom Bishop, were with one exception recent Cambridge University graduates with the correct religious qualifications: Oxford men were excluded. Crowley regarded these tutors as adjuncts of his uncle, prudish, narrow-minded religious die-hards whom he saw it as his duty to lead a merry dance in his search for the ultimate spiritual sin.

His peripatetic travels were not all unpleasant: at St Andrews, he was given a golf lesson by none other than Andrew Kirkaldy, one of the great golfers of the time. A tutor from Caius College, whose father, the Rev. Anthony Ralph d'Arcy, was rector of Nympsfield, near Stroud in Gloucestershire, took him fox-hunting. Crowley enjoyed his visits there and liked the rector, who was a man of mildly scurrilous humour. One of his jokes ran: 'Why is Gladstone's hair like a tuft of grass? Because it grows on top of an old sod.' While trout and salmon fishing on Loch an Ruathair near Forsinard with a middle-aged tutor called the Rev. John Fothergill, an Anglican priest and editor of the two-volume *The Worthies of Westmorland*, Crowley threw the man's fly rod into the water, followed by its owner, who then overturned their boat and attempted to drown his pupil beneath it. That night, Crowley alleges he took off with a local village wench called Belle McKay, with whom he implies he had sex: indeed, this seems to have been the case for, many years later when Crowley drew up a list of his lovers, she was upon it. Whatever the truth, it was enough for Fothergill to resign his commission and take his unruly charge back to London. Crowley claims that *en route* he had sex with a chambermaid in Carlisle.

In his choice of tutors, Uncle Tom made one serious mistake. In the spring of 1891, he appointed a man called Archibald Charles Douglas, the son of the Anglican Bishop of Bombay. An evangelist and one-time Bible Society missionary in Persia, his credentials looked impeccable except he was not an ordained priest and he was an Oxford man. Crowley, convalescing from a bout of whooping cough, was again prescribed country air, so

the plan was hatched for boy and tutor to cycle to Torquay, considered a healthy seaside resort with plenty of beneficial ozone in the salty atmosphere. Crowley, however, could make it no farther than Guildford, from where they continued by rail. Douglas was to prove unlike the other tutors. He may have been an evangelist, but he was also a typical Oxford liberal and Crowley immediately took to him.

> *From the moment that we were alone together* [he wrote] *he produced a complete revolution on my outlook upon life by showing me for the first time a sane clean jolly world worth living in Smoking and drinking were natural He warned me of the dangers of excess from the athletic standpoint He introduced me to racing, billiards, betting, cards and women He told me how these things might be enjoyed without damaging oneself or wronging others. He put me up to all the tricks He showed me the meaning of honour. I immediately accepted his standpoint and began to behave like a normal, healthy human being The nightmare world of Christianity vanished at the dawn I fell in with a girl of the theatre in the first ten days at Torquay, and at that touch of human love the detestable mysteries of sex were transformed into joy and beauty. The obsession of sin fell from my shoulders into the sea of oblivion I had been almost overwhelmed by the appalling responsibility of ensuring my own damnation and helping others to escape from Jesus I found that the world was after all, full of delightful damned souls, of people who accepted nature as she is, accepted their own place in nature and enjoyed it, fought mean and despicable things fairly and firmly whenever they met them It was a period of boundless happiness for me.*

The date of the loss of Crowley's virginity is uncertain. He gives a number of possible occasions, including this encounter in Torquay, although his dalliance with Belle McKay was probably his first experience of heterosexual activity. Whatever the case, Crowley was looking for a good spiritual sin to commit in Torquay and this had promise: he was into puberty, feeling liberated in Douglas's presence and, being both rebellious and from a well-to do background, girls would have been prepared

to indulge him. However, this being released from the chains of the Christian nightmare into the world of women was not his first erotic encounter. One of his tutors, whose brother was the Dean of Westminster Cathedral, had invited him to his mother's home, where he had attempted to seduce him. Crowley, wise by now to these advances had fended him off.

A new Crowley was born in Torquay. Now convinced that sexual repression was a social catastrophe, he viewed the world through new eyes. From his letters home, Tom Bishop and Crowley's mother sensed that something was amiss. Bishop went to Torquay and dismissed Douglas, taking Crowley back to London. Yet the stable door on life had been opened and the free spirited horse had bolted. Crowley had become 'as a god knowing good and evil. I was in a position to take the initiative.' He was not slow in doing so.

2

The Growing God

When he was not travelling with tutors, Crowley's life at home was stultifying. He was forbidden to see other teenagers except the offspring of Plymouth Brethren. Like many lonely or single children, he was by now a keen reader, but his library was severely censored. Sir Walter Scott and Charles Dickens were permitted, except for *David Copperfield*, in which Little Em'ly was considered wicked. It was also feared that the name Emily, being his mother's, might diminish his respect for her: quite how this could have diminished further seems academic. A tutor's book, *The Bab Ballads*, was similarly forbidden as one of the poems began 'Emily Jane was a nursery maid.' Coleridge's 'Rime of the Ancient Mariner' was banned because the sailor inadvertently blessed water snakes and snakes were evil. The Bible said so. On one occasion, Crowley's mother went apoplectic with rage on seeing an Émile Zola novel at a relative's house she was visiting for tea with her son. Crowley used this episode, with others, as justification for thinking – probably correctly – that his mother lived on the fringes of sanity owing to her sexual repression as well as her zealous piety.

Despite such strictures, Crowley succeeded in reading clandestinely. Surprisingly, he was given a small amount of pocket money and used this to surreptitiously buy books which he smuggled home to read in the tranquillity of the lavatory. One, he reported, was *The Mystery of a Hansom Cab*. Had his mother discovered this it would have spelt disaster: she considered the hansom cab, supposedly used

primarily by gentlemen to associate with loose women, to be a diabolical engine.

Such close observation and curfew at home greatly reduced Crowley's chances of spiritually sinning, save for masturbating, and made him regard everyone around him as a spy, a trait that, allied to his occasional shyness, was to be an aspect of his character throughout his life. However, when opportunities arose he made the most of them. One of these took the shape of a parlour-maid. A flirtatious girl, she and Crowley escaped by devil's transport one afternoon and spent a few hours frolicking at Herne Hill. On a Sunday morning, while the family were at their ritual prayers, Crowley excused himself and later alleged he had sex with her on his mother's bed. The relationship was discovered, Crowley denied everything and the girl was dismissed. He felt no remorse, for he laid the blame for the whole affair at the door of his family's puritanism.

One release in which Crowley sought respite, which was to impact itself upon him for life, was poetry.

At school, Crowley had been introduced to the great poets of British literature but had not necessarily taken to them. Most of the teaching had centred on repetitive recitation and learning of lines. There was little interpretative understanding taught. The style of Milton's *Paradise Lost* bored him, but he did enjoy the concept of the Devil as the all-conquering hero, a moral outlaw making a stand against God. He identified with Milton's Satan and saw him as an ally in his own fight. At home, he was permitted access to the works of Tennyson and Longfellow but found it 'impossible to class them as poets. The emasculation of all the characters disgusted me beyond measure. Their very sins are suburban.' For a similar reason – that his work was not proscribed – he ignored Shakespeare and only came to delight in his work when staying at Forsinard with the ill-fated Rev. Fothergill, when a three-volume collected works of the Bard was virtually the only readable book in their lodgings.

Spurred on by reading, Crowley began to write more poetry. His puerile work, he remarked, fell into three stylistic types:

parodies of current songs, lyrical poems based on hymns, and epic narratives based on the stories of Sir Walter Scott.

In his autobiography, Crowley quotes a few lines from a poem entitled 'A Peep Behind the Scenes', these being in a hospital:

In the hospital bed she lay
Rotting away!
Cursing by night and cursing by day,
Rotting away!
The lupus is over her face and head,
Filthy and foul and horrid and dread,
And her shrieks would almost wake the dead;
Rotting away!

The black humour cannot be missed and it is, for an apprentice piece, accomplished. Overtly ironical, the poem parodied a popular book about the life of 'travelling barnstormers and how the only hope for them was to be converted' to Christianity. Poetry was another weapon in Crowley's anti-Christian armoury.

As his poetry developed, it became focused and concentrated upon love and satire. Yet the love of which he wrote was not simply romantic. It was an evil which could only lead to divine retribution. The imagery was often dark, verging on the masochistic, and uncharacteristically intense for someone of his age. Little of this early work, in which Crowley often showed the triumph of youth and emotion over age and moribund respectability, survives. He destroyed most of it, or lost it along life's way, criticising it as 'wooden, imitative and conscious', and it was not until his late teens that Crowley found his true poetic skill.

Among his non-literary reading, Crowley came upon a volume entitled *Lessons in Elementary Chemistry*, by Sir Henry Enfield Roscoe, Professor of Chemistry at Owens College, Manchester, and famous for his method of purifying vanadium. His mother being rather keen for her son to become a doctor

she vacillated between careers for him, ranging from medicine through law to, improbably, evangelism – Crowley was allowed to establish a small laboratory at home: no doubt his interest in a science was regarded by all as a sign the boy was finally settling down to something.

After a number of failed experiments, among them an optimistically infantile project to manufacture diamonds, and an explosion, Crowley had set about making fireworks for Guy Fawkes' Night, 1890. He had buried his cache in a large jar in the playground of Streatham College, but when he set off a rocket the whole collection exploded, blowing in windows and knocking him out. Semi conscious for several days, he claimed that over four thousand pieces of gravel were removed from his face and he was prevented from using his eyes until Christmas. This was an example of Crowleyan exaggeration, yet the event served a purpose, for Crowley was, for a while, the centre of attraction.

Crowley's religious intransigence, stubborn argumentativeness, doubtful morals and unruly behaviour brought both Uncles Tom and Jonathan to the same conclusion. It was time to pack their nephew off to boarding school again but, it was agreed, he should be sent to an accepted establishment and not a religious fanatic's Dotheboys Hall. Jonathan Crowley wanted the boy to go to Winchester, but this was ruled out. After they had cast around for an appropriate school, Crowley was registered as a pupil at Malvern College.

At the beginning of the summer term in April 1891, Crowley departed by train for Great Malvern in Worcestershire. It was hoped by everyone that this would be a new start for him. It was not. Malvern College was simply unsuitable for a boy like Crowley.

It was not that he was academically inferior: in many ways he was academically advanced for his age. Nor was it the case that his religious (or irreligious) views were an impediment to his progress. The problem was he was not as physically strong as his peers, was shy and introverted and no good at sports. Malvern College had a growing reputation in sports. Apart

from the fact that returning to the discipline of school life after many months of comparative freedom must have been a psychological shock. Crowley also had to face the demands of fitting in. He abhorred the place, even more than Champney's school. The prefects ('hulking louts, shirking both work and play, and concentrating on obscenity and petty tyranny') bullied and punished him for not participating in sports while his fellow pupils baited him because he was a loner. He was subjected to such brutish traditions as '"pill-ragging"; a form of fight whose object was to seize and hurt the opponent's testicles; and "greasing"; i.e., spitting either in each other's faces or secretly so the victim should not detect the act.' Enrolled into No. 4 house – the houses at Malvern College were numbered rather than named – under housemaster the Rev. H.E. Huntingdon, Crowley shared a study bedroom with a boy who charged others to sodomise him, buggery being then popular in the school.

Despite the misery of the bullying and Crowley's disdain for the masters – 'importunate and possibly dangerous beggars' – he applied himself to his studies. Like many boys in his situation, he deemed it wise to keep his head down and try not to draw attention. However, he made the conscious decision not to do badly and, although he lacked academic drive, he determined he would pass all his examinations, yet with the minimum of effort and commitment. He had a good memory, especially verbal memory, and it was thought he might make an adequate classical scholar, but he could not be bothered to memorise the set Greek and Latin poetry texts. Indeed, there was little on the curriculum to fire his imagination. He was adept at arithmetic but considered it a subject for tradesmen; trigonometry was similarly dismissed because it was used in the vulgarities of architecture, but algebra fascinated him because it was a pure mathematical subject with, as he thought, little practical application. In his third term, chemistry was introduced under the charge of a superannuated classics master who was largely ignorant of the subject: Crowley saw it as his responsibility to keep the master aware of his errors.

'My life at Malvern,' Crowley wrote in his autobiography,

'made little impression on me. Of the most part I was lost in my own thought and touched school life as little as I could. I made no real friends.' Yet Malvern College had some advantages: he may have been bullied and made no friends but the school was not overtly Christian and he found there a respite from hypocrisy. Now sixteen years old, Crowley was an intelligent, intellectually mature youth. He continued to write poetry and to read as much and as widely as he could, the school affording him chances missing at home.

In the 1891 summer holidays, Crowley and his mother went to the Isle of Skye. Arriving at the Kyle of Lochalsh, they crossed to Kyleakin then proceeded by carriage — presumably not a devilish cab — for twenty-five miles through the desolate, awe-inspiringly beautiful landscape of mountains and sea lochs to the Sligachan Inn, ten miles south of Portree. The inn was a mecca not only for those seeking the health-giving properties of clean air but also for mountaineers. The rugged Cuillin Hills begin less than two miles from the inn.

Considered to this day to be the finest sub-Alpine mountaineering area in Britain, the Cuillin Hills had only recently been made popular by John Norman Collie, a dedicated mountaineer, lecturer in chemistry at the University of London, and the first person to make a practical application of X rays. He had opened the hills up, plotting climbs and mapping out pathways. Mountaineering being a new sport and popular among the wealthy, such places were often crowded with the renowned and rich of the day. At the time Crowley checked into the inn, it was packed with mountaineers and hillwalkers, Sir Joseph Lister, the founder of antiseptic surgery, among them.

Crowley, precocious and inquisitive, fell into conversation with Lister, who persuaded some climbers to take the boy with them the following day. Emily Crowley, no doubt, encouraged this: the open air was what her son was there for and there would be no opportunity to roger a serving maid or village wench on the hills. There was hardly any human settlement for ten miles in all directions. When they set off, early the next day, Crowley had no idea what he was in for: most

likely, he expected a stiff walk to a high place and a return by noon.

The party left the inn to scale Sgurr nan Gillean, some two and a half miles due south of the inn as the crow flies. They crossed the River Sligachan, following a stream called the Allt Dearg Beag, rising quite steeply until they came to a large pool. At this point, they started to climb in earnest up a rocky, bleak ridge called the Pinnacle Ridge, with sheer sides about three-quarters of a mile long. It was hard going but Crowley kept up and attained the summit at an altitude of 3,100 feet. By the time he returned to the inn in the evening, he had caught mountaineering fever.

During the holidays, Crowley complained to both his mother and his uncles about Malvern College, informing them of the bullying but stressing the school's predilection for buggery. Knowing how his relatives thought, and confident of his ability to influence their decisions, he expressed the wish to return to having tutors. They, knowing Crowley's skill at manipulating these unfortunate minders, were not so easily swayed and flatly rejected the tutorial option as a long-term solution. However, on the count of sexual deviancy, they regarded Malvern College as unsuitable and plans were made to transfer him to a school nearer home as soon as was feasible.

Whatever misery school life brought Crowley, it was mitigated by the holidays during which he could take up his new passion of mountaineering. The family welcomed the new hobby, considering it good for his health in more ways than just providing the bracing air of the great outdoors. Such demanding exercise would strengthen his muscles, toughen him up, give him direction and self reliance and, with luck, take his mind off the opposite gender.

Left 'alone with Nature and, away from the tyrants', Crowley's initial mountaineering was more what would today be termed rock-climbing. Mountaineering with rope and piton was in its infancy, most climbers simply scrambling up steep slopes then strenuously walking the uplands. It was a dangerous sport with, in the early years, a high accident rate and not a few

fatalities, yet it provided the Victorian and Edwardian sportsman with a challenge rarely found elsewhere.

At the beginning of the Easter holidays, 1892, after leaving Malvern College for the last time, Crowley was sent to stay on a farm below Langdale Fell, in the Lake District west of Grasmere, from which he explored the surrounding mountains. He had a tutor to chaperone him and keep him away from the arms and charms of the local village girls. At the hamlet of Wastdale Head, above Wast Water, to which climbers flocked from all over Britain, Crowley heard talk of the ultimate local test of stamina and skill. This was to scale the four highest fells, Scafell Pikes, Helvellyn, Skiddaw and Saddleback, in the space of twenty-four hours. Fired by this feat of endurance, Crowley set himself a training exercise. He left the farm at dawn and, having gained his first objective of the Langdale Pikes, he crossed Rossett Pike and Bow Fell, skirted Hanging Knotts and Esk Pike and made for Broad Stand, finally reaching the summit of Scafell. He climbed all day, the heat of the sun reverberating off the crags and scree, hardly stopping except to gain his breath. Having taken no water, he was on the verge of heat exhaustion when, heading north along what is today known as the Corridor Route, he came to Sty Head Tarn. After drinking from the tarn, he turned south-west and, passing Sprinkling Tarn, reached Bow Fell once more. The moonlight was bright but Crowley was exhausted and had difficulty finding his way. At eleven o'clock, he met the rescue party setting out to look for him as he approached Middlefell Place where, today, there is a mountain rescue post.

On another occasion, Crowley took his tutor's sister climbing on the nearby Langdale Pikes. The sister – her age is unknown but she seems to have been older than Crowley – was frozen with fear at one place, breaking into what he termed an emotional monologue of prayer punctuated by screams and demands that he, beneath her on the climb and only able to assist her from below, avert his eyes from her legs. She was, he remembered later, an example of 'craven fear, prurient shame and narcotic piety: of such is the kingdom of Tennyson.'

As his confidence grew, Crowley started not only to climb with more experienced men but set out with, it must be admitted, some degree of adolescent arrogance to conquer routes and climbs as yet untamed. One of these was a direct ascent of Mickledore, immediately to the east of the modern mountain rescue hut. During one of his ascents, he was overtaken by an electrical storm, claiming his steel mountaineering axe was struck by lightning: more likely it became charged with static electricity, fizzing to the touch. Both excited and terrified by the storm, Crowley ran down the mountainside, leaping from outcrop to outcrop. This, he admits, took great concentration, but he was too carried away by the moment and Scafell 'framed in lurid purple storm clouds and literally ablaze with lightening' to care about his safety.

While climbing on Scafell, Crowley met a local farmer named John Wilson Robinson, who had done much to promote climbing in his native Cumberland. He took a shine to Crowley, showing him some of the easier, one-man climbing routes. Another of his acquaintances on this holiday was Owen Glynne Jones, introduced to him by Robinson. One of the pioneer rock-climbers, Jones was a science teacher who invented the first system of classifying ascents by difficulty. Somewhat taciturn, he was a strong man whom other climbers respected, but he failed to be recognised as an alpinist. Nevertheless, he registered twenty three initial ascents in Britain as his own.

Crowley was critical of people whom he considered to be humbugs or famous beyond their worth. He reckoned Jones was such a one and accused him of self-aggrandisement and, worse, dangerous climbing practices. Not to Crowley's surprise, Jones was killed in 1899, with two guides, while climbing the difficult Ferpècle Arête on the Dent Blanche near Zermatt in the Alps. Of this tragedy, Crowley confidently remarked that the 'dangers of mountaineering are ridiculously exaggerated. I have never known of any accident which was not due to ignorance or folly.'

The holidays came to an end and Crowley set off from Streatham to Tonbridge, in Kent, where he was to enter Tonbridge School, enrolling in the Middle V class on 12

May 1892 as a member of a boarding house called Ferox Hall House. The mountain-climbing had, indeed, toughened him up. He entered the school ready to take on the world and, within a short time, had established himself in his new environment, partly by seeing off the tyrants. More mature than most of his peers, he had, as he put it, 'developed a kind of natural aristocracy. People were already beginning to be afraid of me and there was no question any longer of bullying.'

Tonbridge School was altogether more organised than Malvern College. The masters were in control, and although the general public school ethos was as strong, with prefects holding positions of disciplinary power and ritual initiations a part of new boys' lives, the school was less barbaric. Excellence in sport was not emphasised and sodomy was not, it seems, an extramural activity. Crowley not only fitted in but made friends, including a boy called Adams, a fellow member of Ferox Hall and the nephew of John Couch Adams, the famous mathematician, astronomer and discoverer of Neptune. According to Crowley, Adams was a Billy Bunteresque figure who, having one day received two pounds in pocket money, purchased eighty ice creams from the school tuck shop and ate the lot himself at one sitting.

Despite Crowley's settling to Tonbridge, his health again failed. He admitted this was partly his fault. First, he was prone to bouts of depression and unhappiness which sapped him. Second, he laid the blame at not having been properly educated, by which he meant in the area of sexual hygiene. He wrote, in *The World's Tragedy*, that his ill health was caused as a 'direct result of the vile system that, not content with torturing me itself, handed me over bound and blindfold to the outraged majesty of Nature'. In the margin of his own copy of the book, he wrote 'I caught the clap from a prostitute in Glasgow' and, in middle age, admitted to having contracted gonorrhoea in 1893. Certainly, his teachers and tutors were not likely to have warned him of venereal disease, nor how to avoid it, and it was hardly a topic his mother and uncle would have discussed.

Crowley's time at Tonbridge passed without incident. He

does not seem to have caused too much trouble, which implies he was much happier there. His academic work progressed and he was less rebellious. The downplaying of religious activities in the school and his abiding absorption with mountaineering somehow filtered out his angst and ire. Nevertheless, he was still ardently anti-Christian and knocked the religion whenever the opportunity arose.

After a year at Tonbridge, Crowley left and, in the summer of 1893, was sent to live in Eastbourne, the seaside town in East Sussex, where he lodged at 4 Sussex Gardens with a tutor called Monsieur J.A. Lambert, a Frenchman and Plymouth Brother who advertised himself as a professor of languages, taking in pupils to whom he taught French and English. Apart from studying with Lambert, Crowley attended chemistry classes under Professor R.E. Hughes, whom he claims he assisted in some experiments at Eastbourne College. No record exists of Crowley at the college, nor was Hughes ever on the staff: it seems likely Crowley merely attended evening classes in the town.

When the chance arose, Crowley escaped the observing eye of Monsieur Lambert and, allegedly, trawled Eastbourne in search of sexually accessible women and games of chess. With characteristic immodesty, he claimed he discovered he was the best chess player in the town and wrote a chess column in the *Eastbourne Gazette* in which he heavily criticised his fellow chess team members. This did not enamour him to them.

However, there was another local attraction which took much more of his attention than both girls and chess. It was Beachy Head.

The highest headland on the south coast of England, Beachy Head rises for 500 feet above a rocky seashore, less than two miles west of the town. A chalk cliff, its face is unstable, slippery when wet and loose when dry. Although cliff climbing was an established sport, and many mountaineers scaled the coastal cliffs of southern England in order to train for alpine ascents in Europe, Beachy Head was avoided and considered too dangerous. Crowley, needless to say, dismissed this and determined to master the cliff.

The climb was foolhardy in the extreme. Chalk is notoriously difficult to climb. One cannot cut footholds in it because it is too friable; it is often insufficiently hard to take a piton and handholds are made by scooping out a hole or clearing debris from an existing one. Dig too large a hold and the surface above breaks free and falls, carrying the climber with it.

Undeterred, Crowley went to Beachy Head and 'settled the point by walking up, smoking a pipe, with my dog (I had no woman available) in nine and a half minutes from the beach to the coastguard station,' reporting afterwards that Beachy Head was a water-worn slope of steep chalk and rotten grass. It is doubtful if he scaled the steepest part in the fashion of a country stroll; it is more likely his first ascent was not of the headland itself close to the lighthouse but of the less steep slope to the east of it, above the rocky spur of the foreshore.

Yet the real climbing was to follow. Gregor Grant, Crowley's cousin, joined him during some of his Beachy Head ascents. Crowley was a methodical climber, careful to note his every move and each feature he came upon. Indeed, he claimed he named some of these: Etheldreda's Pinnacle (named either after his dog or a schoolgirl he knew: Crowley failed to recall which and the name was probably ironical in any case for Crowley referred to ugly girls as dogs), the Devil's Chimney and the Cuillin Crack. The latter was almost his downfall. On one climb, in the company of others, Crowley was trapped and the assistance of the coastguard was needed to free him. He not surprisingly fails to recall this in his memoirs. Nevertheless, he gained the admiration of climbers, and one of his routes up Beachy Head has, in *Sea Cliff Climbing in Britain*, drawn the comment, 'One can therefore only marvel at Crowley and his friends who managed to effect a traverse on this slope, up and down, beneath the projections at the cliff-foot in the course of their explorations'. Sadly, many of these features Crowley mastered have since eroded and fallen into the sea.

His climbs on Beachy Head were not believed by everyone. The greatest of the early mountaineers, Albert Frederick Mummery, the founder of alpine mountaineering and a legend

in his own time who died at the early age of forty in 1895, was dubious about the achievements. Crowley wrote to him and sent him photographs as proof, which drew the great man's admiration. The *Eastbourne Gazette* was not quite so admiring: an article on Crowley's endeavours was headlined 'Insensate folly takes various forms'.

About this time, Gregor Grant became engaged to be married and declared he was no longer willing to risk his life. Crowley was devastated. Grant had been his hero, one of the few people who had made his early years bearable and one of his earliest friends in religious adversity. He summed up his response to the news quite succinctly: 'I received my first lesson in what the religions of the world have discovered long since, that no man who allows a woman to take any place in his life is capable of doing good work.'

An anecdote from this period, which Crowley told forty years later, concerned his mother and Beachy Head. He had taken her there and, leaving her to paint, went climbing. He was well up the cliff when he heard her call out for help, although he was sure he could not have actually heard her and that what he discerned was a psychic message. He returned to find her slipping down the cliff and saved her life. He classed his action as a 'regrettable incident of impulsive humanitarianism.'

With Grant hanging up his climbing boots, Crowley teamed up with another climber, J.S. New. Together they mapped the face of Beachy Head, and Crowley wrote up their experiences for the *Scottish Mountaineering Journal*. His name becoming known in mountaineering circles, Crowley became acquainted with a number of other leading figures in the sport and, on 7 December 1894, he was elected to the membership of the Scottish Mountaineering Club. He was proposed by A.E. Maylard and seconded by John Norman Collie. To have Collie second him was quite an honour, for the chemistry lecturer was by now very famous, not only for his climbing in Britain but also for making the first guideless ascent of Mont Blanc by the Old Brenva Route.

By now, Crowley was well and truly besotted with mountaineering. It gave him much that had previously been missing from his life. Climbing mountains offered him freedom, a chance to test himself, a means to be recognised as an equal by other men and a sense of power. 'The beauty of form and colour, the physical exhilaration of exercise, and the mental stimulation of finding one's way in difficult country, formed the sole elements of my rapture,' he wrote. His soul was elevated. Like mountaineers ever since, he discovered some kind of inner harmony, some sort of mystical peace in the loneliness and majesty. 'A mountain skyline [he considered] is nearly always noble and beautiful, being the result of natural forces acting uniformly and in conformity with law. Thus, though it is not designed, it is the embodiment of the principles which are inherent in design.' He further enjoyed the company of tough men and relished living in the rough. His first overnight stay in a mountaineering tent convinced him that camping was exciting and exhilarating. He declared, 'The mere feeling of being in the fresh air under the stars when one goes to sleep, and of waking at dawn because it is dawn, raises one's animal life ipso facto to the level of poetry.'

Crowley's climbing was not restricted to the Lake District and Beachy Head: he also climbed in Scotland and Snowdonia. Wherever he went, he claimed new routes and climbs for himself, sometimes annoying fellow climbers with his arrogance and determination to be the one who had opened up such and such a climb, sometimes insulting them for not having attempted the same route because of fear or ineptitude; yet he earned their admiration, even if reluctantly.

Emily Crowley, and her brother Tom, believing mountaineering was changing Crowley for the better, encouraged it. In the summer of 1894, this encouragement took the form of his being financed to climb seriously for the first time. His destination was the Alps.

Travelling with a tutor, Crowley went to the Suldenthal in the Austrian Tyrol, armed with *Mountaineering* by Clinton Thomas Dent, one of the first authoritative books on the

subject. Once there, he hired Joseph Pingerra, the best mountain guide in the area. Despite Crowley conceitedly claiming he was a better rock-climber than Pingerra, he wanted to be taught the techniques of climbing on ice and snow. When the guide slipped on a snow slope and was only saved by Crowley at the other end of the rope, he decided he would forgo instruction and teach himself. His experiences on Beachy Head considerably helped him. He was able to assess the breaking point of ice just as he had chalk, and his sense of caution and balance were honed by it. After several days' practice, Crowley made a lone ascent of the Ortler by way of the Hintere Grat. At the summit, he met an American and his guide who had climbed by an easier route: the guide was astounded at Crowley's success. By the end of the summer, he was a proficient snow and ice climber.

At some time in the second half of 1894, Crowley fell out with Monsieur Lambert, one of whose daughters, Isabelle, became engaged to a young man who refused to convert to the Plymouth Brethren. Lambert broke off the engagement, kept his daughter locked in the house and, in Crowley's eyes, cruelly abused her. He spoke his mind and, it is thought, came to blows with Lambert. Tom Bishop, summoned by telegram, caught the next train for Eastbourne and removed Crowley from Sussex Gardens. A family conference was called. It was now clear that Crowley, verging on manhood, was just as unruly and headstrong as he had always been. His spirit had not been broken. There was no alternative now but to let him go out into the world. He was lost to the Brethren, to reason, to Christianity. They had done their best and failed.

With the climbing season over in the Alps, and a new academic year looming ahead, Crowley had to decide on his future. His immediate decision seems to have been to embark upon a career already under consideration by his mother. In late September 1894, he enrolled as a non-matriculated student at King's College, in the University of London, reading medicine and Natural Sciences.

Why he chose King's College is unknown, but it may have been suggested to him by John Norman Collie, who was assistant

to Sir William Ramsay, Professor of General Chemistry at the university and, later, a Nobel Prize-winner for his work on inert gases. Certainly, Crowley attended lectures given by both men.

As soon as the weather turned in the spring of 1895, Crowley began to prepare for a return to alpine climbing and, the minute the academic year ended, he was off. Travelling to the Bernese Oberland, his first endeavour was a solitary ascent of the Eiger during which he met a party of English climbers with their guides. He went to the summit with them and they all descended together. Later that summer, he climbed the Eigerjoch, Jungfraujoch, Monch, Jungfrau, Wetterlucke, Monchjoch, Beichgrat, Petersgrat and the Tschingelhorn. His climbing, according to T.S. Blakeney in an article in the May 1952 issue of the *Alpine Journal*, was 'if not outstanding, at least promising, though somewhat erratic, and there was abundant testimony, by men as competent to judge as John Norman Collie, Maylard, Solly, H.V. Reade, Eckenstein and Larden ... that he was a very capable climber, particularly on rocks (though Maylard also thought him the best amateur step-cutter he had seen); and only Larden was disposed to regard him as reckless.' Many of Crowley's climbing expeditions were solo, for he preferred to be on his own. Partly he wanted to be at one with nature, but partly he believed it was safer to climb alone. He held a dim opinion of the local guides and most other climbers with the exception of men like Mummery, Collie and Hastings (who was with Mummery and Collie in the Himalayas when the former was killed), who were setting new standards of alpine climbing.

Crowley's trip to the Alps was cut short by a telegram from London. At some point, he had expressed a wish to apply for a place at the University of Cambridge, and his family now decided to approve and support this notion. The entrance examinations and interviews for Trinity College were just a week off, so Crowley immediately returned to Britain by train, travelled to Cambridge and sat the exam papers. He passed them all, giving, he claimed, well above average translations of the set Greek and Latin texts, despite not having had a chance to prepare for them.

In many ways, Crowley was ready for the next stage in his life. He was mature in that he could converse with his elders on equal terms, was physically strong and used to independent, reasoned thought. And yet, in some aspects, he was incredibly immature. He found it hard to relate to those of his own age and he was arrogant in the extreme. In one respect, he was astonishingly immature: he could not handle money. 'I was taught,' he admitted in his autobiography,

> *to expect every possible luxury. Nothing was too good for me, and I had no idea of what anything cost. It was all paid for behind my back. I was never taught that effort on my part might be required to obtain anything that I wanted, but on the other hand I was kept criminally short of pocket money lest I should spend it in some disgraceful way, such as buying books or tobacco, or spending it on even worse abominations such as theatres and women. (I was encouraged to keep a dog.) I had therefore no sense of responsibility in the matter of money. It never occurred to me that it was possible to make it, and I was thus trained to be dependent to the point of mendicancy. The effect was, of course, disastrous. I doubt whether anyone in history was ever furnished with such a completely rotten preparation for the management of practical affairs.*

He was, however, grateful for his wealth and for one other thing. His upbringing had 'taught me to fight, to love the truth, to hate oppression, — and by God! I think they taught me well. On my soul, I should thank them.'

Thus prepared, or ill prepared, depending upon one's point of view, Crowley set forth to embark upon the remarkable journey of his adult life.

3

A Trinity Man

Crowley went up to Trinity College, Cambridge, in October 1895. He signed the college register as Edward Aleister Crowley. He was determined to find himself a new identity to go with his new life.

There has been much speculation as to why Crowley chose to call himself Aleister. He was reluctant to use his father's name, Edward, because it could be shortened to Ned or Ted, which had common undertones. He abhorred Alexander because it was derived from a devout Christian family friend and the diminutive was his hated family nickname of Alick: it could also be reduced to Sandy or Alec, as common as Ted and Ned. Another motive for changing his name lay in the fact that Crowley had been told, or had read, that if one wanted to be famous, one's name should consist of a dactyl followed by a spondee. Or it could have been a trochee. Ideally, the name should consist of five syllables, the last two being somehow poetic in rhythm. Eventually, his cousin Gregor suggested he drop his first name and retain his second but give it what he thought was the Gaelic spelling: this loosely tied in with Crowley's mistaken belief in his Irish ancestry. In fact, the Gaelic spelling was correctly Alaisdair, but this did not grammatically fit. On the other hand, Aleister met the criteria, so that is what the new undergraduate went for, although, he later surmised, he would doubtless have become famous regardless of his name.

So equipped, he was ready to start afresh and embark upon adulthood. 'I found myself,' he wrote, 'my own master, and settled down to lead a righteous, sober and godly life; and to

make up for lost time in the matter of education.' The ancient university and city gripped his imagination. 'I was,' he declared, 'part of the glories of the past; and [he added with optimism and characteristic self-assurance] I made a firm resolution to be one of the glories of the future.'

In his first year, he rented comfortable rooms at 16 St John's Street. His ability to handle his finances being somewhat unformed – as it was to remain, to a greater or lesser extent, throughout his life – all Crowley's bills were paid direct from home by his mother and uncles. This meant he was permanently in credit but had little cash: if he wanted actual money in hand, he was obliged to visit a pawnshop. It also allowed him to indulge himself and he was not slow in spending his invisible and seemingly bottomless income. This situation changed, however, when he came of age.

On his twenty-first birthday on Monday, 12 October 1896, Crowley received an inheritance that his father had left in trust for him. According to Crowley's deposition to a bankruptcy hearing into his affairs in 1935, his father's legacy was for the sum of £45,000. In addition, he later received other legacies over a period of years totalling another £55,000. As an undergraduate, there were persistent rumours of Crowley being very rich, although he took pains to pronounce otherwise. A friend observed him on one occasion fumbling for a cab fare because he was short of cash: of course, he might just have been holding back to let someone else pay. The total of his inheritances over the years thus came to about £100,000, the equivalent of nearly £6 million at 2000 rates of value.

What is certain is that Crowley was somewhat profligate with his money. He bought any clothes he thought befitted his status and image, spent large amounts on books, ate and drank well, and possibly bought himself an early motor car. He mentions at one point in his undergraduate years his 'racing roadster having sprung a leak', he was delayed at Hitchin, about halfway between London and Cambridge. Alternatively, he could have been referring to a bicycle: Crowley was a keen cyclist as a young man.

Once established in his college, Crowley entered for the Moral Science tripos in the hope it might give him a liberal education. When he discovered that one of the subjects included was Political Economy, and attended the first lecture during which the don teaching the course declared the subject difficult because it lacked reliable supportive data, Crowley quit the course. Or so he said. He apparently received approval for this withdrawal from his personal tutor, Dr A.W. Verrall, whom he found sympathetic to his desire to study English literature, which was not on the university curriculum. Verrall believed Crowley's previous education sufficient to carry him through his examinations simply by reading set texts and attending the occasional lecture or tutorial for guidance. The truth may not be far from this, for it was not unknown for students to succeed in this manner. Certainly, Crowley must have worked hard, not only at what he wanted to but also to meet the course requirements. Trinity College archives record that Crowley matriculated in 1895, passed subsequent examinations in 1896 and 1897 (including a special examination in Chemistry in the latter year), attaining second class degree standards. He did not, however, graduate.

While Crowley generally enjoyed his three years of university life, there were some aspects which irked him. In Trinity College, attendance at chapel services was compulsory, but Crowley managed to avoid this by conveniently citing his upbringing as a Plymouth Brother. After his first few terms, he began to disassociate himself from college life, avoiding dining in hall whenever possible and having his meals sent to his rooms by his college servant: all undergraduates had their own college-appointed servant who serviced their rooms, saw to their laundry and looked after their material needs. The loner in him kept him apart from the ordered regime of college life and the dons who ran it. There was, however, one college institution to which he gave some time. It was the Magpie and Stump Debating Society, of which he was a member in his first year. Yet even his interest in this palled in his second year for he found he could not abide the members

('young asses') emitting 'their callow opinions on important subjects'.

Much of Crowley's time was spent reading, writing and playing chess. His mentor was a student called Adamson whom he met through chess, who was also a keen reader of English literature. Through him, Crowley was introduced to an extensive and eclectic body of writing, voraciously purchasing and reading books, often following up a reference from one book to another until he acquired as much knowledge on a topic as was possible. He revelled in being able to allow his mind to follow its own path from author to author. With this academic freedom, he was able not only to read an author's more notable works but his entire output, and he soon acquired an encyclopaedic knowledge of some of the most important British writers and thinkers of the previous centuries, as well as French and classical authors. A self imposed rule was that he eccentrically ignored novels over a certain length and memoirs, which he classed as unreliable gossip regardless of their literary merit. Another rule was that he would not read any author who had not been dead for fifty years: Crowley was reluctant to have his mind tainted by what he saw as the hypocrisy and strictures of the Victorian age, valuing only those whose work had stood the test of time.

There were a few exceptions, notably Sir Richard Francis Burton. Explorer, oriental scholar and writer, Burton had worked for the East India Company as a military officer and was a brilliant linguist but, in 1853, had brought much public attention to himself when he published his account of how, disguised as an Afghan, he had entered the holy Islamic city of Mecca, closed to non believers. Burton was not only not a Muslim, but also a European. Had he been found out, he would have been publicly executed by the mullahs. The following year, he explored Somaliland with John Hanning Speke, then went on to fight in the Crimea, discover Lake Tanganyika with Speke, enter the diplomatic service and be posted to Bioko (then known as Fernando Pó), Brazil, Damascus and Trieste. All the time, he wrote of his adventures, but he is best known

today for his translation of the oriental stories known as *The Arabian Nights.*

Burton became Crowley's hero, whom he considered to be 'a supreme master; the greatest that ever took to pen.' Yet there was more to it than mere admiration for Burton's writings. Burton was a romantic, an adventurer who risked both his reputation and his fortune (or, more accurately, his wife's fortune) fighting convention and Victorian prudery. He was all to which Crowley aspired, a man of action, a renegade thinker, a rebellious spirit and an eccentric. His influence upon Crowley was to be extreme, for it was Burton who pointed him towards the East.

Much of Crowley's reading was kept secret from his friends. Afraid he might be ostracised for being a 'smug' or swot, he outwardly gave the appearance of being a lad about town. He played chess and cards in the taverns, rowed and cycled and drank. Most of his friends were not fellow undergraduates. He was, he said, 'not interested in the average man; I cultivated the freak. It was not that I liked abnormal people; it was simply the scientific attitude that it is from the abnormal that we learn.' That his peers, by dint of the fact they had been accepted into the university, were to some extent unique and therefore freaks themselves does not seem to have occurred to him.

His main connection with university social life was the Cambridge University Chess Club. In his first term, he beat the club president, W.V. Naish, who was so impressed that he took Crowley to Peterhouse, where he was beaten by H.E. Atkins, later to become the English amateur chess master. Crowley claimed this was the first time since he had learned chess that he was beaten. He studied the game intensely, putting his mind to it for several hours a day for weeks on end, assessing and devising strategies. During his second academic year, Crowley was voted president of the club and represented not only Trinity College in inter-college tournaments but also the university. He rarely lost and had the ambition to become a world chess master.

Chess was an abiding passion throughout Crowley's life. It

was his claim that playing chess gave one an excellent insight into human psychology, and he used it to assess others. In later years, his powers of concentration were such that he could play several games simultaneously, while blindfold. His opponents would call out their moves which Crowley could then visualise in his mind: he could keep three games going at once in this way, a skill that was to lead to an apocryphal story. On one occasion, Crowley was in a bedroom having sex while, next door, a friend sat at a chess board. The bedroom door being open, Crowley responded to each move without breaking his stroke, so to speak - and he won the game. In fact, so good a chess player was Crowley that he has gone down in the annals of the game. The authors of a book entitled *The Complete Chess Addict*, listing their dream teams of famous people, include him in the 'Sinners' team under the captaincy of Rev. Harold Davidson, the defrocked vicar of Stiffkey, in Norfolk, who was famous for exhibiting himself in a barrel on Blackpool's Golden Mile and was eventually fatally mauled by a lion called Freddy in Skegness amusement park in 1937. Crowley, one would like to think, might have enjoyed his company.

As he came to the end of his second university year, Crowley started to give thought to his future and decided that a career in the diplomatic service might suit him. It seemed to 'afford the greatest opportunities for worldly enjoyment, while at the same time demanding the highest qualities of mind. The subtlety of intrigue had always fascinated me.' Certainly, it had its attractions: he would be able to travel, find adventure and become a romantic in the footsteps of his hero, Burton. He mentioned the idea to his mother and uncles, who approved. It was, after all, a respectable profession. In order to be considered, however, he required a nomination, but this was readily forthcoming. Uncle Jonathan Crowley's wife was a member of the Primrose League and had a degree of influence with Lord Ritchie and Lord Salisbury, former Foreign Secretary and Prime Minister respectively.

Even with such illustrious backers, Crowley still faced an obstacle in the languages required by diplomatic cadets.

Although he could readily pick up the grammar, Crowley was impatient at acquiring vocabulary and poor at achieving the right pronunciation, being hampered by his inability to articulate the letter *R* and his hearing, which was not very acute. It was decided, of the four languages a cadet required, he might choose Russian as one of them: he already had a command of English, French and, possibly, Italian or Greek. Russian was a good choice. Few candidates offered it and, if he could come to grips with it, Crowley was assured a posting to the Tsar's court in St Petersburg.

Consequently, in the summer of 1897, Crowley travelled to St Petersburg with the intention of learning Russian. He failed. It was not that he was idle or incapable. He just had no interest in it. To study Russian was a heavy chore. The language was difficult and he was not interested in accepting such a tiresome academic discipline. After all, this was what he had tried to avoid at Cambridge.

His trip did, nevertheless, have a lasting effect upon him, but not one he had anticipated. On his return by rail to Britain, Crowley stopped off in Berlin to attend an international chess congress. He entered the hall where the games were being held and underwent what he considered a mystical experience. It was as if he was having an out-of-body journey, stepping back from reality and surveying the assembled chess masters before him, all of them looking like shabbily dressed parodies of humanity. At that moment, he realised he did not wish to retain chess as anything other than an interesting pastime.

His Russian study trip was not the first or only foreign journey of his university years. Reluctant to return home to Streatham in the holidays, and being bankrolled by his mother, his uncles and his inheritance, Crowley took to travelling to Europe by rail, preferring to visit Holland, Denmark and Scandinavia. Wherever he went, he observed the local people and their customs, enjoying societies somehow removed from that of England and her two cultural neighbours, France and Germany. And, of course, he climbed mountains.

The summers of 1896 and 1897 saw Crowley in the Alps,

usually the Bernese Oberland. As a mountaineer, he was little changed. He showed off in front of local guides, mocking them for their timidity, climbing with agility but some recklessness and generally puffing himself up. He made a number of first climbs and traverses across rock faces, on one occasion going alone after his companion slipped and fell. one does not hear in Crowley's memoirs what became of him. Of another falling climber, Crowley recalled catching him by his collar as he slid by, an anecdote which has to be viewed with a jaundiced eye. Despite his arrogance and bragging, he continued to profess a lack of interest in personal fame and glory and was ready to share his discovered routes with other climbers, although he was prone to say they might find them hard and risked falling if attempting them. Putting himself apart from most other climbers, Crowley wrote that it was 'a remarkable fact that only very exceptional men retain their normal reasoning powers in presence of mountains ... A high degree of spiritual development, a romantic temperament and a profound knowledge based on experience of mountain conditions are the best safeguards against the insane impulses and hysterical errors which overwhelm the average man.' Doubtless, Crowley considered himself an exceptional man, all the more so in later years when he was liable to admit that his excellent sense of direction on mountains was due to his psychical powers rather than, as in the case of others, observation of topography and geology. His skill was, he believed, a matter of the subconscious registration of the position of his body at various times during the day. To supplement this, he claimed a memory for the most minute of details and the ability to smell snow and water. The latter is not likely: Crowley's sense of smell, like his hearing, was below average. However, for a man who could keep the on-going state of play of three simultaneous chess games alive in his head, the former claim is probably true.

For a week in August 1896, Crowley teamed up with Morris Travers, John Norman Collie's demonstrator at the University of London They climbed and spent a week travelling through the Alps, not once dropping below the summer snowline. This

achievement under their belt, they moved on to the Vuibez Séracs glacier, considered unconquerable without guides, and traversed it, the first ever to do so. Shortly afterwards, towards the end of the month, they completed the first traverse of the Aiguilles Rouges. It was while climbing with Travers and his brother that Crowley suffered an injury. Sleeping on a rock face overnight, he was forced to hunch up in a crevice in such a way that he damaged the cartilage in his knee, which gave him bouts of pain and discomfort for many years.

When Travers, whom Crowley respected for his strength and courage and in whose awe he was held – on one climb, Travers bridged a crevasse with his body so that Crowley could cross and later held him on his shoulders for over half an hour as he cut handholds in the ice – had to return to London, Crowley was joined by Gregor Grant. With his cousin, whom Crowley noted with characteristic misogyny was 'by this time married and had discovered that his life was not worth keeping', he made the second ascent of the north-north-east ridge of Mont Collon. Grant found the climb heavy going, the choice of their descent route deemed near impossible. Forced to spend the night on the mountain, they met the search party sent out to find them in the morning.

Impressed by his mountaineering abilities, John Norman Collie proposed Crowley for membership of the exclusive Alpine Club in London, the first alpine mountaineering society in the world. It was a signal honour, but Crowley had little time for the membership whom, he said, were incompetents and did not really climb, as he did, but merely went up mountains accompanied by guides. He also believed they were jealous of his achievements gained either on his own or with one or two others – and without guides. It was his opinion but, to be fair, he was not alone in holding the view. Many believed mountaineering was being held back by Alpine Club members, who refused to honour true climbers whom they accused of falsifying records to their glory.

In fact, Crowley did not at first reject his being proposed: perhaps he did not want to insult John Norman Collie and

thought he might become a power for good in the ranks of the club. However, he was led to believe his joining would be opposed, as it was felt that his climbing record was too good to be true, so he withdrew. When word of this reached Cambridge, it was put about that Crowley had been blackballed. The rumour monger was an undergraduate whom Crowley, as president of the university chess club, had rejected as unsuitable for the post of club secretary. Crowley proudly noted in his autobiography that he thrashed the scandaliser.

Although he avoided chapel services in college and remained a fierce critic of established Christianity, be it Anglicanism, Roman Catholicism or the Plymouth Brethren, Crowley did not give up all thought of religion. He considered himself to be a religious reactionary conservative, and came to terms with Christianity through what he termed the Celtic Church. This was not a religious movement as such but a series of ideals popularised by Arthurian legend, which was going through a revival at the time. It was a mishmash of chivalrous imagery and romanticism, a moral world controlled by magic. Sacramentalism was important. Sin was neither feared nor abhorred. Chastity was a virtue. There were no priests and no cathedrals: as in oriental religions, mountains and forests were holy places. Crowley liked the idea of this movement but he never entertained the principles. He was still eager to rid himself of Christianity by deliberate acts of sinning, and he lived for the best part for pleasure.

That said, he did briefly join a secret society operated by a don at Pembroke College, a clergyman by the name of Heriz-Smith. Non members ironically referred to its advocates as the Belly-banders because they wore cummerbunds around their waists during initiation ceremonies. There were seven degrees of initiation of which Crowley took the first, largely out of curiosity. He did not bother with the remainder and soon drifted away.

Yet the course of Crowley's spiritual and material life was about to undergo a profound change. It began in Stockholm around midnight on 31 December 1896.

'I was awakened,' Crowley wrote in his memoirs, 'to the knowledge that I possessed a magical means of becoming conscious of and satisfying a part of my nature which had up to that moment concealed itself from me. It was an experience of horror and pain, combined with a certain ghostly terror, yet at the same time it was the key to the purest and holiest spiritual ecstasy that exists.' At the time he was unaware of the relevance of this knowledge but, exactly a year later, almost to the minute, the experience was repeated. He wrote, 'my animal nature stood rebuked and kept silence in the presence of the immanent divinity of the Holy Ghost; omnipotent, omniscient and omnipresent, yet blossoming in my soul as if the entire forces of the universe from all eternity were concentrated and made manifest in a single rose.'

A second occurrence took place during the October in between. Crowley fell ill and, on his sickbed, meditated upon human mortality, deciding that death as such held no terror for him; yet he was shocked by the futility of human existence in the face of it. He decided there and then that he had no time to waste on being famous and making his mark. The question then arose as to how to achieve this. Diplomats were seldom remembered. Poets were only slightly less forgotten. He was, he admitted, 'not sufficiently enlightened to understand that the fame of the man had little or nothing to do with his real success, that the proof of his prowess lay in the invisible influence which he had had upon generations of men', but he knew that to achieve lasting fame he had to be something nobody else had ever been, or even could be. He had to 'find a material in which to work which is immune from the forces of change . . . Spiritual facts were the only things worth while. Brain and body were valueless except as the instruments of the soul.'

Considering the matter further, Crowley was unwittingly embarking upon the magical – he later termed it magickal – journey that was to take up the remainder of his life. He had come to terms with 'the first manifestation of my true will. I had thrown myself with the utmost enthusiasm into

various occupations from time to time, but they had never occupied my entire attention. I had never given myself wholly to chess, mountaineering or even poetry. Now, for the first time I felt myself prepared to expend my resources of every kind to attain my purpose.' That purpose was to understand and become a part of the spiritual world that lay behind, or beyond, the religious.

Applying himself to the problem, Crowley came to the conclusion, reached long ago by many others, that spiritual existence was two-sided. On the one hand was God and Goodness while on the other was the Devil and Evil. Just as Milton expostulated in *Paradise Lost*, which Crowley had read, these two spheres were equal and opposite and neither could exist without the other. The analogy was that there was no point in having a light if you did not have a dark to put it in.

His course was plain. 'The forces of good,' Crowley acknowledged, with which he had been more than familiar throughout his childhood, 'were those which had constantly oppressed me. I saw them daily destroying the happiness of my fellow-men. Since, therefore, it was my business to explore the spiritual world, my first step must be to get into personal communication with the devil.'

The die was cast. Crowley was on his magical way towards fame, infamy, vilification and a reputation he could hardly have foreseen.

His first plan of action was to study 'black magic', and one of his initial steps was the purchase of a copy of A.E. Waite's *The Book of Black Magic*. One of the foremost occult writers of his time, Waite was born in 1857 and, by the 1890s, was a member of a well-known and influential mystical society. Crowley superciliously regarded Waite as 'not only the most ponderously platitudinous and priggishly prosaic of pretentiously pompous pork butchers of the language, but the most voluminously voluble'. His style of writing was, to be charitable, cumbersome, yet what he had to say was well considered and Crowley came to the conclusion that black

magicians and devil worshippers did not regard Satan as he did but that they did, at least, go about their studies in a scientific way. Of this Crowley, with his ordered mind, approved. Where he and the black magicians did agree was in the possibility of there being a technique by which a man could force the powers of nature into obeisance.

Yet there was more. Waite implied, as Crowley put it, that he 'knew of a Hidden Church withdrawn from the world in whose sanctuaries were preserved the true mysteries of initiation'. Crowley was coming to the conclusion that all religions had their basis in one true Church and wrote to Waite, who replied somewhat vaguely to the effect that Crowley should read more mystical literature, recommending von Eckartshausen's *The Cloud upon the Sanctuary*, which told of the existence of a secret conclave of saints or initiates who possessed and guarded the mysteries of God and Nature which could bring all religions together.

Crowley devoured the book. The concept of the secret order captivated him. It appealed to his romantic nature and he determined to bring himself to the notice of these mysterious worthies. He embarked upon a reading programme of every mystical work he could find, soon becoming (in his eyes, at least) an expert on everything from alchemy to occult symbolism.

To say that Crowley was an ideal subject to become a student of the occult is to understate: apart from his romantic and poetic notions, he was intellectually sharp and able to assimilate the complexities, ambitious and hungry for knowledge and, above all, wealthy enough to indulge his enthusiasm.

All the while he was engrossed in his new studies, Crowley continued with his other passion – sex. Free of parental and tutorial observation, he led a very active sex life. He found he 'was of an intensely passionate nature, physiologically speaking. My poetic instincts, further, transformed the most sordid liaisons into romance, so that the impossibility of contracting a suitable and serious relation did not worry me. I found,

moreover, that any sort of satisfaction acted as a powerful spiritual stimulus.'

Sex was also intellectually or creatively important to him. His yearning was a 'blind, horrible ache for relief' which, if not met, affected his studies. He found 'even forty-eight hours of abstinence sufficient to dull the fine edge of my mind.' In creative people, this relationship between sex and intellectual achievement is not uncommon: it is as if the act of sex not only releases physiological tensions but also encourages creative thought.

Most of Crowley's liaisons were with prostitutes or, more often, girls he picked up in taverns. Working- and lower-class girls often frequented Cambridge's pubs, looking to be wined and dined and sleep with wealthy undergraduates. His

> *sexual life was very intense. My relations with women were entirely satisfactory. They gave me the maximum of bodily enjoyment and at the same time symbolised my theological notion of sin. Love was a challenge to Christianity. It was a degradation and a damnation. Swinburne* [another living writer who had circumvented Crowley's fifty-years-dead reading rule] *had taught me the doctrine of justification by sin. Every woman that I met enabled me to affirm magically that I had defied the tyranny of the Plymouth Brethren and the evangelicals. At the same time women were the source of romantic inspiration, and their caresses emancipated me from the thraldom of the body.*

His attitude towards the women with whom he fornicated was, however, one of low regard. As they were for the most part uncultured, uneducated young women, he found them morally and mentally contemptible.

> *They had* [he stated] *no true moral ideals. They were bound up with their necessary preoccupation, with the function of reproduction. Their apparent aspirations were camouflage. Intellectually, of course, they did not exist. Even the few whose minds were not completely blank had them furnished with Wardour Street Chippendale. Their*

attainments were those of the ape and the parrot These facts did not deter me. On the contrary, it was highly convenient that one's sexual relations should be with an animal with no consciousness beyond sex.

This low opinion of women was coloured by Crowley's animosity for his mother, and his general misogyny arose out of his relationship with her. Women were oppressors to be vengefully oppressed, a commodity, Crowley surmised in his autobiography, which should ideally be delivered daily to the back door, with the bottles of milk. They were there to be used: and yet, at other times, he would declare that he was unselfish towards women, liked their company and saw it as his function to pleasure them sexually. In his verse, he either idolised women or portrayed them as sexually rapacious demons. There is an anecdote, said to be true but impossible to prove, which has the young Crowley being invited to join a witches' coven but turning down the offer as he did not wish to be dominated by women. As will be seen, Crowley's attitude towards women throughout his life was open to some whimsical fluctuation.

Critical of Victorian attitudes to sex, Crowley saw nothing wrong in his behaviour. What had started out as deliberate sin-making was now an acceptance of natural desires to be fulfilled. He considered monogamous marriage a brake upon natural order and a corrupting of society by unnatural suppression. In Crowley's opinion, the flesh demanded little respect, being merely a vehicle for, as he saw it, the person. Consequently, he had no fear of contracting a venereal disease (and he scorned those who suppressed their desires because of it) which, invariably, he did, nor did he care if he passed it on. Apart from his dose of the clap picked up from the Glaswegian tart, Crowley also caught syphilis in 1897, during his second year at Cambridge. He received treatment for it, the application of highly poisonous salts of mercury and, in middle age, mentioned the fact to a Parisian doctor, claiming that he never exhibited any major symptoms of the disease. Additionally, he made no effort to prevent himself infecting others with it. Indeed, as he later

wrote, he believed that the disease, which could lead to madness and death, was a sign of genius and declared 'it would be salutary for every male to be impregnated with the germs of this virus in order to facilitate the culture of individual genius.'

Despite his precocious heterosexual activity, Crowley was essentially bisexual with a predilection for aggression and sadomasochism, the reasons for which have been variously attributed to his repressed upbringing, his loss of a father figure during his formative years, his exposure to sodomy at Malvern College, the cruelty of Champney's academy, his attempted seduction by a tutor, and a variety of other esoteric psychological causes. Another reason for this ambiguous sexuality in his early adulthood was his being ever ready to experiment, either out of curiousity or in his search for a good sin. And so it was that, while he was up at Cambridge, Crowley had his first homosexual experience.

Where his early homosexual seductions took place is somewhat uncertain; however, the times are fairly clear. His experiences of New Year's Eve 1896 and 1897 were more than just a spiritual revelation, and his description of them and of his awakening could be read in an altogether different light. Years later, when Crowley compiled a list of critical events in his life, he included 'Admitted to the Military Order of the Temple midnight, December 31, 1896' and 'Admitted to permanent office in the Temple midnight, December 31, 1897.' A footnote to these entries reads. 'Discretion deprecates elucidation of any obscurities in this passage'. So much for Crowley's desire that all sexual matters be openly expressed. Yet one must remember that homosexual and heterosexual anal sex were then criminally indictable: he was hardly going to want to share Oscar Wilde's fate and wind up in prison.

Further clues lie in two poems he wrote in this period of his life. The first, 'At Kiel', suggests the event occurred during a brief visit to the city:

Oh, the white flame of limbs in dusky air,
The furnace of thy great grey eyes on me

Turned till I shudder. Darkness on the sea,
And wan ghost-lights are flickering everywhere
So that the world is ghastly. But within
Where we two cling together, and hot kisses
Stray to and fro amid the wildernesses
Of swart curled locks!

The other, 'At Stockholm', which ends:

What time for language, when our kisses flow
Eloquent, warm, as words are cold and weak? –
Or now – Ah! sweetheart, even were it so
We could not speak!

gives another venue. Support for the Stockholm theory is further strengthened by a story published in part in *The Magical Link* between 1990 and 1994. Entitled *Not the Life and Adventures of Sir Roger Bloxam*, it is a semi-autobiographical tale of Crowley's sexual adventures with military officers. His being inducted into the 'Military Order of the Temple' has misled some previous biographers, who have assumed it referred to Crowley being initiated into the freemasonic order of the Knights Templar. This, however, is not possible: to become a member one must first be a craft (ordinary) freemason, which Crowley was not. His 'temple' is a metaphor for his homosexual exploits, a not uncommon figure of speech in the then clandestine world of homosexuals.

In homosexual dalliances, Crowley was usually the sodomised, taking the passive role, with no emotional participation. He preferred to be buggered for it appealed to his masochistic side. Later in life, Crowley defended homosexuality: in *The World's Tragedy*, he wrote, 'lest "broad-minded" prigs come to smash me by their aid, I shall fight openly for that which no living Englishman dare defend, even in secret – sodomy! At school I was taught to admire Plato and Aristotle, who recommend sodomy to youths. I am not so rebellious as to oppose their dictum; and in truth there seems no better way

to avoid the contamination of woman and the morose pleasures of solitary vice.' He went on to quote the names of such famous homosexuals as Alexander the Great, Napoleon, Goethe, Francis Bacon and Shakespeare, and criticised heterosexual love on the grounds that, while women were not unclean, 'it is the worship of them as ideals that rots the soul.'

Of course, homosexuality being regarded as a criminal offence, indulging in it was yet another opportunity for Crowley to determinedly sin. In a tiny red leather-bound notebook of his earliest poems, the fifth example commences:

He who seduced me first, I could not forget.
I hardly loved him, but desired to taste
A new strong sin.

The delight he gained from being sodomised is hinted at in another poem in the notebook, which ends:

Have I then sunk so low? My lips are lined.
I paint my cheeks to lure a man — to death.
I sell my body, gaudily attired
Tricked out: you suck a harlot's scented breath.

To think a man should kiss me for a price —
Did Jesus dream of such a sacrifice?

His expatriate homosexual acts were transient affairs but, in the first term of his third year at Cambridge, after moving into new rooms at 37 Trinity Street, Crowley met someone with whom his homosexual couplings were rather more meaningful.

The partner with whom he joined up was Herbert Charles Jerome Pollitt. Tragic of face, sad of mouth and with a shock of long blond silky hair, Jerome Pollitt (as he preferred to be called) was, like Crowley, a Trinity man. Born at Kendal in 1871 and four years older than Crowley, he had graduated in 1892 with a Bachelor of Arts degree, gaining a Master's degree

in 1896. Although he had a family home in Westmorland, he preferred to remain in Cambridge after graduating, primarily in order to continue to pick up undergraduate lovers rather than to gain his MA. His reputation lay not in academic prowess but in the fact that he had, as an undergraduate, been well known through the famous Footlights Dramatic Club as a dancer, cross-dresser and female impersonator, going under the pseudonym of Diane de Rougy, a play on the name of Liane de Pougy, a notorious lesbian actress at the Folies-Bergeres.

In the autumn term of 1897, Crowley and Pollitt met on a number of occasions and corresponded over the Christmas vacation, during which Crowley had his second magical homosexual experience. It may well be that Crowley and Pollitt did not actually engage in sex together until after Crowley returned to Cambridge following Christmas, charged with his new membership of his 'military order'.

In his autobiography, Crowley implies that his friendship with Pollitt was purely platonic, a meeting of like minds, but it was in fact his first sexually intimate friendship, based upon their shared homosexuality. Before he knew Pollitt, Crowley said he had never had a male friend 'of sufficiently exalted ideal and refinement to awaken serious sympathy. Pollitt was a new species. My feeling for him was an intensely pure flame of admiration mingled with infinite pity for his spiritual disenchantment. It was infinite because it could not even imagine a goal and dwelt wholly amid eternal things.'

It was a strange relationship. Pollitt showed little interest in Crowley, was dismissive of his poetry and blind to his magical and religious ambitions, which he knew would eventually come between them. Yet he appreciated Crowley's company, found him intellectually interesting and a compliant lover. For Crowley's part, their association was

> *that ideal intimacy which the Greeks considered the greatest glory of man-hood and the most precious prize of life . It was the purest and noblest relation which I had ever had with anybody I had not imagined the possibility of so divine a development. It was, in a*

sense, passionate, because it partook of the white heat of creative energy and because its intensity absorbed all other emotions. But for this very reason it was impossible to conceive of it as liable to contamination by any grosser qualities It was so free from any impure ingredient that my friendship with Pollitt in no way interfered with the current of my life I went on reading, writing, climbing, skating, cycling and intriguing, as if I had never met him.

The impure ingredients were there, but Crowley chose to ignore them, and it is clear that this great friendship was built on shifting sands. Crowley always referred to it in detached, unaffectionate ways. Partly, this was to camouflage the true nature of the friendship, yet it was also a matter of fact: theirs was essentially a friendship of convenience.

Apart from its sexual content, the relationship was important to Crowley because it brought out his female side and established in his mind, once and for all, his dual sexuality. This much he admitted, for he was to remark that he 'lived with him [Pollitt] as his wife.' From an early age, Crowley sensed he had a feminine side. He wrote that his limbs were graceful and his breasts larger than those of other boys. This is not to say that Crowley was effeminate or that these features were genetic. He was a sickly child at times, who did not go out and play in the rough-and-tumble fields of boyhood, so it follows that his limbs were not muscular. As for his breasts, it must be remembered that he was somewhat podgy as a child. He, however, saw them as indicative of effeminacy, although he was quick to add that they were not present at the expense of his perfectly normal masculinity.

His supposed hermaphroditism also gave Crowley what he believed was his understanding of female psychology and his ability to be sexually impartial and exhibit maternal instincts on spiritual levels. As a result, he was able to 'emerge from the battle of sex triumphant and scatheless.' In other words, he always had the better of women, or so he thought. Furthermore, he was convinced that his sexual ambiguity meant he was able to 'philosophize about nature from the standpoint of a complete

human being; certain phenomena will always be unintelligible to men as such, others, to women as such.' He was capable of formulating 'a view of existence which combines the positive and the negative, the active and the passive, in a single identical equation', his savage masculine creativity being in turn 'modified by the gentleness and conservatism of woman hood.'

Crowley would have liked to have been a true hermaphrodite. It would have added to his self-image of uniqueness and further set him apart from mere mortals. Yet he was not: he was simply bisexual.

As well as giving expression to the identity of his sexuality, Pollitt did influence Crowley. A close friend of Aubrey Beardsley, he introduced Crowley to the latest developments in art and literature, prompting him to read the new genre of decadent writers and study the art of people like Beardsley and Whistler. Crowley claimed that he despised the work Pollitt brought him to, yet he also admitted to liking it: 'The intense refinement of its thought and the blazing brilliance of its technique helped me to key myself up to a pitch of artistry entirely beyond my original scope; but I never allowed myself to fall under its dominion.'

There has been much speculation over the years as to whether or not Crowley ever met Beardsley. Although he never recorded them having met, they almost certainly did. Crowley was to write of him intimately in a poem:

Aubrey attained in sleep when he dreamt this
Wonderful dream of women, tender child
And harlot, naked all, in thousands piled
On one hot writhing heap, his shameful kiss
To shudder through them, with lithe limbs defiled
To wade, to dip
Down through the mass, caressed by every purple lip

At one point, Crowley tried to persuade Beardsley to design his bookplates and illustrate his work, but Beardsley demurred. It is likely that Beardsley saw association with the extrovert

Crowley as risky at a time when the moralists in society were looking to attack the new genres in art and literature. Nevertheless, it is thought he may have drawn a bookplate, yet no example remains extant.

It is exceedingly ironic that these two kept away from each other, for they had a family connection. Beardsley's father had been employed for years by Crowley's Ales, as a personal assistant to Edward Crowley's father and, possibly, even to Edward Crowley himself. When Crowley's Ales was sold in 1877, Beardsley's father was given a glowing reference with which to seek a new job.

Where Crowley was poetic, romantic, intellectually curious and fascinated by magic, Pollitt was just plain boring. He lacked imagination, had no creativity, was in poor health, for which he refused the usual medicines, was filled with self-pity, and looked upon life with a jaded eye. He was a pitiful character, yet Crowley kept up their relationship. During the Easter term of 1898, they met daily and, when the Easter holidays arrived, went to Wastdale Head together, walking over the fells. Pollitt refused to climb.

By the time they returned to Cambridge for the new term, Crowley realised that their relationship was ending. There was, he noted, 'a deep-seated aversion of our souls' and he knew they had nothing in common, and could give nothing to each other except sexual gratification. Pollitt had served his purpose. He had been, as Crowley put it, 'the only person with whom I had ever enjoyed truly spiritual intercourse', but now he had to choose between Pollitt and his magical ambitions, which had been heightened during the Easter by his reading of *The Cloud upon the Sanctuary*, which Pollitt almost certainly ignored or derided. His worry was coming true: Crowley's religious interests were coming between them. Once back at Cambridge, Crowley came to his decision: 'Human friendship, ideal as it was in this case, was under the curse of the universal sorrow. I deliberately determined to give it up.'

At the end of the summer term, Crowley having essentially completed his three years of university attendance, he went to

stay at the Bear Inn in Maidenhead, to get away for a quiet time in which to write. Pollitt, worried at losing his lover, tracked him down. Crowley informed him he was now giving his life to spiritual matters. They parted and most likely never met again.

Crowley, recalling their friendship in later years, stated: 'a nobler and purer comradeship never existed on this earth, and his influence might have done much to temper my subsequent trials. Nevertheless, the fragrance of that friendship still lingers in the sanctuary of my soul.' Yet this was written with hindsight. At the time, Crowley turned against Pollitt. He wrote a number of sonnets in which he attacked his former lover. Collectively and cruelly entitled *To the Author of the Phrase 'I am not a Gentleman and I have no Friends'*, one began:

Self-damned, the leprous moisture of thy veins
Sickens the sunshine, and thine haggard eyes,
Bleared with their own corrupting infamies,
Glare through the charnel-house of earthly pains,
Horrible as already in hell

Theirs was a relationship which Pollitt hoped might become the love of his life but which Crowley saw, as would any young man, as a passing phase in his development.

At Wastdale Head, as the affair was imploding, another person entered Crowley's life who was to be far more influential than the self pitying Pollitt. His name was Oscar Eckenstein.

The thirty-nine-year-old son of an exiled German Jew and an Englishwoman, Eckenstein had studied chemistry at universities in London and Bonn and was employed as a railway engineer. Bearded and belligerent, he was eccentric, intolerant, stubborn, opinionated, original and idiosyncratic. Among his many foibles was an abhorrence of kittens, but not grown cats, and a cautious concern about certain numbers. For example, if a serving of food contained the 'wrong' number of potatoes, he would refuse the plate until the mathematics had been corrected. Not all his originality was of his own making.

For some years he was periodically subjected to physical attacks by complete strangers, who tried to kill him: he assumed it was a case of mistaken identity.

Whatever his faults, he had one forte that set him above most men. He was an astonishingly accomplished mountaineer. Although a short, stocky man, he had immense upper body strength and could pull himself up a rock face with just his right arm. He could last long hours without tiring. Highly critical of the Alpine Club, the members of which he (like Crowley) considered were little more than guided dilettantes, his skill and courage were belittled in his own lifetime, and it was only after his death that he took his rightful place in the annals of mountaineering.

Crowley and Eckenstein had much more in common than a shared love of climbing. Eckenstein was an outspoken but erudite and educated conversationalist. He admired Sir Richard Burton, played chess and was loath to suffer fools gladly. According to Crowley, his moral code was greater than that of any other man he knew. They argued on philosophical points, for Eckenstein held that virtue and pleasure were irreconcilable and he believed deeply in the concept of sin. Generally, however, they got along famously. The charismatic Eckenstein was the very antithesis of the self-pitying, whingeing Pollitt. What Crowley was looking for, as his relationship with Pollitt faded, was a new impetus in his life. He was soon to leave Cambridge and was searching for a mentor, a kindred spirit who could guide him, an intellectual companion in whose judgment he could place his trust. Eckenstein was ideally suited to the role.

Mountaineering is a test of more than muscle. It is one of character. Eckenstein had what it took to be a mountaineer. He was utterly dependable, level-headed and a logical thinker who designed an advanced type of 'ice claw' for ice wall climbing which later became widely accepted by mountaineers and was the forerunner of the modern crampon. He took no ill-considered risks, knew his limitations and was a good leader, having already proved himself in the Alps and

on Sir William Martin Conway's Himalayan expedition to the Karakoram mountain range in 1892, although he had fallen out with Conway and quit.

Crowley became Eckenstein's climbing partner, declaring he could not have had a better climbing teacher. The ideal companion, Crowley judiciously realised, was one whose skills complemented one's own. 'Eckenstein,' he wrote, 'had all the civilized qualities and I all the savage ones.' Their climbing techniques were utterly dissimilar. Eckenstein climbed logically, thoughtfully, assessing the way ahead. Crowley, despite his chess-playing mind, was more headstrong. Eckenstein was physically strong, as was Crowley, but their techniques differed: where the former used selected muscles, Crowley used his whole body. In 1924, Crowley wrote in a letter to a friend, 'Eckenstein, provided he could get three fingers on something that could be described by a man far advanced in hashish as a ledge, would be smoking his pipe on that ledge a few seconds later, and none of us could tell how he had done it; whereas I, totally incapable of the mildest gymnastic feats, used to be able to get up all sorts of places that Eckenstein could not attempt.'

Leaving Pollitt to brood at Wastdale Head, Crowley and Eckenstein climbed together in the vicinity of Scafell. By the end of Easter, Crowley 'had the great good fortune to be adopted by this man.' They planned to meet in the summer in the Alps and, tentatively, gave thought to a trip to the Himalayas.

Eckenstein's no-nonsense approach to life, his loathing of hypocrisy and the maintenance of his high moral ideals with unflinching candour, were much admired by Crowley, who stated that he

> *learnt intolerance of all pretence and humbug from Eckenstein who had on me somewhat the influence that Athos had on d'Artagnan Whenever I was tempted to derogate in any way from the highest standards of honour, the thought always came to me that I could not face Eckenstein if I failed My family, my college and my friend have always been my mentors, but, above all, my friend! His severity was fortified by his clear sight; no subterfuge was*

> *possible with him. He taught me to judge my conduct by the most austere standards of rectitude and nobility. It is not too much to say that he created my moral character. I had a fatal tendency to find excuses for myself. He forced me always to face the facts and keep ceaseless vigil over the jewel of honour.*

To what extent Crowley's family (his father apart) and his college had been his mentors is debatable; it can also be mooted, in the light of what was to come in Crowley's life, that Eckenstein did not do a very good job.

Throughout his time at Trinity College, Crowley wrote a prodigious amount of poetry and regarded himself as a poet. His creativity spurred on by his sex life, he found his soul 'free to wing its way through endless empyreans and to express its godhead in untrammelled thought of transcendent sublimity, expressed in language which combined the purest aspirations with the most majestic melodies'. He was not content to leave his work in a folder. Poets had to be published and Crowley was certain his work was of a sufficiently high standard to warrant appearing in print. Consequently, in 1898, he embarked upon a programme of publication. With a substantial private income, he was able to publish everything he wrote, the quality of it inevitably variable. Being no self-critic, Crowley put into print whatever he felt was of merit, sometimes before the ink was barely dry. Some of the verse was good, but just as much was trite and banal in the extreme.

His first publication was a thin volume entitled *Aceldama*, the author given as a 'Gentleman of the University of Cambridge', in imitation of Shelley's *The Necessity of Atheism*, published pseudonymously by a 'Gentleman of the University of Oxford' in 1811. It was imitative in more than its authorship, the contents being a sort of sub-Swinburnian-cum-Baudelairean hotchpotch. The edition consisted of eighty-eight copies with another ten on special paper and two on vellum. Priced at half a crown, it was sold privately in the university. The publisher was a man called Leonard Charles Smithers.

A Cambridge bookseller and printer, Smithers was famous

as a leading publisher of erotica and pornography, who had brought out work by Oscar Wilde, Aubrey Beardsley and other 'decadent' writers. By the time Crowley met him, he was in decline. The trial of Oscar Wilde had made the publishing of erotic literature, especially that with homosexual undertones, a very risky business. The arrival of Crowley on his doorstep must have been welcome, for here was a young man with a large private fortune, reams of poetry and an enormous ego eager for publication.

Describing *Aceldama* as 'the summit of my Parnassus', Crowley considered it his best work to date, technically excellent and the 'pure expression of my unconscious self. I had no corresponding mental concepts at the time. It enounces a philosophy which subsequent developments have not appreciably modified. I remember my own attitude to it. It seemed to me a wilfully extravagant eccentricity.' Never a truer word was spoken: the term 'vanity press' might have been invented for Crowley.

The book was hardly noticed and received just one review which remarked, 'there runs through [the poetry] a vein of scepticism and licentiousness which requires to be treated with caution': it was not recommended as reading material for the young. The irony of the warning cannot be lost: from his first-ever appearance in print, Crowley was regarded as a figure to be watched. In 1904, when he was to publish a book of undergraduate lyrics entitled *In Residence*, the university magazine *Granta* acknowledged it with a piece of vituperative but witty and perspicaciously prophetic doggerel:

Oh, Crowley, name for future fame!
(Do you pronounce it Croully?)
Whate'er the worth of this your mirth
It reads a trifle foully.
Cast before swine these pearls of thine,
O, great Aleister Crolley
'Granta' today, not strange to say,
Repudiates them wholly.

Later in 1898, Crowley produced a thicker book called *White Stains*, purportedly by George Archibald Bishop, 'a Neuropath of the Second Empire'. Smithers published it, Crowley giving it to him as he knew he could trust him with the manuscript, which it would have been risky sending out to any other publisher. Such was the nature of the contents, Smithers had the book typeset in Holland.

Taking a rise out of Crowley's pious uncle, Tom Bond Bishop, the book contained a cycle of poems about a sexual psychopath who becomes a murderer. Erotic, the poems cover nearly the full gamut of sexual activity, from ordinary hetero-sexuality through to pederasty. When people in later years used the book as proof of Crowley's corruption, he retorted, 'Asses! It is, indeed, technically, an obscene book, and yet the fact that I wrote it proves the purity of my heart and mind in the most extraordinary fashion,' going on to claim that it was manifest evidence of his 'essential spirituality' and stood as a 'testimony of my praeterhuman innocence.' He justified the book by saying he had been prompted to write it after reading von Krafft-Ebing's *Psychopathia Sexualis* in which it is argued that sexual abnormality is the result of disease Crowley profoundly disagreed, and said the poem cycle set out to disprove the theory by telling the story of a poet whose initial innocence was transmuted into vice, each poem explaining the underlying psychology. It was not, he maintained, intended to be regarded as pornographic but as an affirmation that such behaviour was an exhibition of sexual magic and, therefore, acceptable. Nevertheless it was, by contemporary standards, pornographic.

Like *Aceldama*, the poetry owes more than a passing allegiance to Baudelaire and was prefaced by Crowley requesting that 'Mental Pathologists, for whose eyes alone this treatise is destined will spare no precautions to prevent it falling into others' hands.' An example of the less scatological poems gives an insight into the poetry:

White arms that clasp me, fervent breast that glides
An eager snake, about my breast and sides,

And white teeth keen to bite, red tongue that tires,
And lips ensanguine with unfed desires,
Hot breath and hands, dishevelled hair and head,
Thy fevered mouth like snakes' mouths crimson red,
A very beast of prey; and I like thee,
Fiery, unweary, as thou art of me.

When the poetry became just a little too heated, Crowley, in the convention of pornographic publishing, slipped coyly into another language:

Clitoridette, m'amourette,
Ote ta jolie robe d'or,
Tes roses bas, chemise nette,
Et découvre pour moi le con,
Le con que j'aime, aux cheveux noirs,
Le cul ou tu m'admets ce soir,
Les seins je baise, que j'adore,
Tous les secrets de ton boudoir.

Another book, *Green Alps*, was never published. Crowley paid Smithers for it but the latter reported that the printing works had burned down, destroying manuscript and typeset pages. Smithers was on the point of being declared bankrupt, and it has been suggested that he pocketed Crowley's money to stave off his debtors, fabricating the story of the fire. Fortunately, Crowley already had a set of galley proofs and was able to incorporate the poems into later volumes.

It was evident that Smithers would have to be replaced. The man to whom Crowley transferred the privilege of printing his work – still financed by the author himself – was Charles Thomas Jacobi, the manager of the Chiswick Press in London. Until his death in the 1920s, Jacobi remained Crowley's loyal printer. The quality of the Press's output was very high: they would today be classed as fine art printers. Crowley also required a publisher and chose the established London firm of Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner, later to become Routledge, Kegan Paul.

Why Crowley picked this firm, and why they agreed, is open to speculation. They were respectable publishers of oriental books with a reputation for contemporary verse: they had been Tennyson's publisher. These facts would have appealed to Crowley. Like Smithers, they may have welcomed him as he was footing the bill. Whatever the case, they brought out his third volume, *The Tale of Archais*, also in 1898.

This book was more widely reviewed, possibly because it had been issued by an established publisher. A summary of the coverage, mostly in university and literary magazines, has it as a spurious romanticised mythology written in a facile rhythm, lacking originality and, surprisingly, free from the pollution of sensuality.

As if three books in one year were insufficient, Crowley went on to bring out *Songs of the Spirit*, a collection of lyrics which was still more noticed, and farther afield. The *Manchester Guardian* faintly praised it, *Granta* admitted it showed literary merit, the *Literary Gazette* cautioned Crowley to be less introspective, the *Athenæum* panned it and, with an irony Crowley cannot have missed, the *Church Times* said it was ambitious and predicted 'excellent work from Mr Crowley when his philosophy of life has been matured'. The year 1898 ended with the appearance of Crowley's fifth book in almost as many months. *Jephthah* was widely and well reviewed as far afield as Aberdeen and Sydney, Australia, the *Pall Mall Gazette* stating somewhat far-sightedly, 'Mr Crowley takes himself very seriously; he believes he has a mission.'

Crowley may have been gaining critical notice but he was not selling his books. Most were given away to friends or acquaintances and sales were minuscule. According to Timothy d'Arch Smith, the noted bibliographer, Crowley mailed eighty-two review copies of *Jephthah* but only ten sold in the next five years.

His early poetry was underlain by Crowley's developing magical ambitions and his continuing obsession with the nature of sin. He was much under the influence of *The Cloud upon the Sanctuary* and keen to gain access to the brotherhood to

which the book referred. Additionally, he was still engaged in coming to terms with evil, about which his considerations were somewhat bizarre and ill-formed. 'Religion was for me,' he thought, 'a passionate reality of the most positive kind. Virtue is etymologically manhood. Virility, creative conception and enthusiastic execution were the means of attainment. There could be no merit in abstention from vice.'

The publication of *Aceldama* brought another person into Crowley's sphere. In the summer term of 1898, just before Crowley left university, he was introduced to a young undergraduate who was reading political science but was an accomplished watercolourist. His name was Gerald Festus Kelly. Born in 1879, the son of the well-to-do Vicar of Camberwell in south London and a wealthy mother, Kelly was an Old Etonian who had come up to the university the previous autumn having spent much of the last year convalescing in South Africa after undergoing surgery to remove an abscess from his liver. He had two abiding passions – cricket and painting.

How they met is not known, but it is thought they were introduced by Smithers, who showed Kelly a copy of Crowley's first book. As a result, Crowley invited Kelly to his rooms in Trinity Street. They immediately hit it off and agreed to meet in the summer.

Kelly, a charming and talented if somewhat naive young man, was attracted to the older, flamboyant and handsome Crowley, who wore large, foppish bow ties, wide-brimmed hats, large rings set with semi-precious stones and hand-made silk shirts. They had much in common. Both came from privileged backgrounds, both had money, and both had reacted against religious parents and upbringings. The fact that Crowley's rooms were eccentrically appointed – furnished with such items as a card table carefully strewn with poker chips, the walls lined with valuable first editions and a climber's ice axe mounted over the door – only increased his appeal. Kelly seems to have overlooked the state of his silk shirts, which were grubby and, in true student style, in need of laundering. Concerning Crowley's alleged lack of personal hygiene, a story

has circulated for years to the effect that Crowley was once dunked in a fountain by boisterous fellow undergraduates, in order to get him clean, but this seems highly unlikely. It would have been very difficult for anyone to overpower Crowley, who was strong, muscular and tall, and he was never to deride his time at Cambridge, which he would have done had it been marred by incidents of such ragging, even if he had suppressed knowledge of them. The tale is another of the many told to belittle or ridicule him.

His university career drawing to a close, Crowley did not sit the 1898 degree examinations. He was not afraid of failure: he simply could not be bothered. Having an excellent memory, and knowing he had mastered those subjects he had chosen to study, he saw little point in being examined. Like Swinburne, who had refused to be examined at Oxford because he considered, probably correctly, that he knew more than the examiners, Crowley considered the examinations futile. He knew where he was going. He was going to achieve immortality. A degree was irrelevant to his quest, in which he could only guarantee success by magically controlling the secret forces of nature. He was not going to be a Master of Arts but a Magus.

Summing up his three years at Cambridge, Crowley immodestly wrote in his autobiography,

> *Like Byron, Shelley Swinburne and Tennyson, I left the university without taking a degree It has been better so, I have accepted no honour from her, she has had much from me* [He went on] *I wanted the spirit of the university and I passed my* [interim] *examinations in order to be able to imbibe it without interference from the authorities, but I saw no sense in paying fifteen guineas* [the graduation fee] *for the privilege of wearing a long black gown more cumbersome than the short blue one, and paying thirteen and fourpence instead of six and eightpence if I were caught smoking in it I had no intention of becoming a parson or a schoolmaster, to write B A after my name would have been a decided waste of ink*
>
> *I felt that my career was already marked out for me. Sir Richard Burton was my hero and Eckenstein his modern representative, as*

far as my external life was concerned. A baccalaureate would not assist me noticeably in the Himalayas or the Sahara. As for my literary career, academic distinction would be a positive disgrace. And with regard to my spiritual life, which I already felt to be the deepest thing in me, the approbation of the faculty was beneath troubling to despise. I had got from Cambridge what I wanted: the intellectual and moral freedom, the spirit of initiative and self-reliance, but perhaps, above all, the indefinable tone of the university.

So it was, in July 1898, without a degree but with a direction in sight, Crowley left Cambridge.

4

The Golden Dawn

Once down from Cambridge, Crowley found himself a free agent with a private income and no immediate demand to find employment. In his own words, he was 'white-hot on three points; climbing, poetry and Magick', all of which constituted, to a lesser or greater extent, his determined career. He embarked upon life with gusto and considerable, if not greatly self-disciplined, energy.

Within weeks of moving out of his Trinity Street rooms, Crowley and Eckenstein were living in a tent on the Schonbuhl glacier below the 4,300-metre high summit of Dent Blanche. The plan was to train Crowley for a trip to the Himalayas and find a new route up the east face of the mountain. This was scotched by the weather closing in, restricting Crowley's learning to life in a high-altitude camp and cooking, which included inventing his glacier curry, which had climbers rushing out to eat snow after the first mouthful: Crowley was, throughout his life, to be known for his spicy cuisine. While there, he started reading *The Kabbalah Unveiled* by Samuel Liddell Mathers, published in 1887. He admitted not understanding a word of it yet it held him, partly because of its incomprehensibility, which he determined to penetrate.

Another factor mitigated against his climbing. His health deteriorated and necessitated him going to Zermatt to rest. While recuperating, he visited a beerhall crowded with mountaineers and, with typical Crowley panache, started to lecture those who would listen on the subject of alchemy. Among his audience was a British climber, Julian L. Baker, an analytical

chemist, a student of magic and a real practising alchemist who claimed he had 'fixed mercury'. Crowley could not believe his luck. For months, he had been wondering how he might gain access to the magical world and now, seated before him, was a man who could make the introductions.

When Baker left Zermatt, Crowley followed him and admitted to him reading *The Cloud upon the Sanctuary* and his desire to find the Secret Sanctuary of the Saints. Baker, much taken by Crowley's eager sincerity, confessed he was not a Master who could help him, but he knew a man who could.

His health not improving, Crowley returned to London, took a room in the Hotel Cecil on the Strand, attended doctors' surgeries, wrote poetry – he was working upon *Jephthah* at this time – and met Baker, who introduced him to George Cecil Jones.

A quick-tempered, bearded Welshman who looked uncannily like the stereotypical Victorian portrait of Christ, Jones was an industrial chemist with a laboratory in central London and a house near Basingstoke, in Hampshire. He was also widely read in the subject of magic, which he studied with scientific curiosity and exactitude. Crowley paying full attention to his talk of magic, they became close friends, a relationship that was to last many years.

At this stage, Crowley was trying to soak up as much knowledge of magic as he could. It is important, however, to understand what this magic comprised. To come to terms with it, one must approach it with a completely open mind.

Crowley himself defined magic as 'the art of communicating without obvious means' – in other words, by using one's willpower; or, to put it in his own words, 'Magick is the Science and Art of causing Change to occur in conformity with Will.' Another definition Crowley offers explains it thus: 'From the nature of things . . . life is a sacrament; in other words, all our acts are magical acts. Our spiritual consciousness acts through the will and its instruments upon material objects, in order to produce changes which will result in the establishment of the new conditions of consciousness which we wish.' He gives an

example in the Roman Catholic Mass, when the will of the presiding priest transforms the wafer of bread and the chalice of wine so that they are charged with divine properties which give physical expression to spiritual matter. Yet it is Crowley's conjecture that we all do this by our actions, as we will them. A parallel might be a man who digs his garden with a spade he has purchased, who is using his willpower to turn the soil, for the money earned from his own energies is causing the ground to be dug: he willed the digging by buying the spade.

Within days, Crowley embarked upon practical experiments with astral visions. Baker, according to Crowley, instructed him to

> *imagine an image of yourself* [known as the Body of Light], *standing in front of you. Transfer your consciousness to it. Rise upward. Invoke the forces desired by the prescribed methods. Observe their appearance. Test their authenticity. Enter into conversation with them. Travel under their guidance to the particular part of the universe which you desire to explore. Return to earth. Cause the Body of Light to coincide spatially with the physical. Reconnect them, using the sign of Harpocrates. Resume normal consciousness*

The Body of Light was created out of Astral Light, the universal matter sometimes known as the ether and highly sensitive to any influence or stimulus. This included human thought, which it was believed emanated from the brain in wave form. If these thought waves could be magically concentrated and aimed at the Astral Light, the matter could then be shaped into an image projected or created by the thought. Once one could attain a Body of Light, telepathy, thought transference and, ultimately, even time travel were considered possible.

Everything Crowley picked up from Jones he tested and, as with mountaineering, soon believed he was better at it than his teachers. Certainly, he found the magical exercises came easily to him. In a very short time, he believed he had mastered the knack of developing a Body of Light so powerful that ordinary people could see it and, later, he built up such an independence

of consciousness that it could travel away from him without his being aware. Rumours, he claimed, were to reach him from friends who said they had seen him in a place where he was not present at the time. It was his Body of Light they saw, not him.

Not all his magical activities were successful. Crowley tells of one experiment he conducted at Eastbourne, where his mother had taken a house. One night at low tide, he went to the water's edge, as far as he could get from the esplanade, and, drawing a circle in the sand and erecting a small altar of stones, he burned incense and driftwood and performed a rite. He was hoping to invoke the Undines, female water spirits which associate with humans, but all that appeared was a curious police constable, attracted by the sight of a man chanting in the moonlight and prancing round a small bonfire. Whether there is any truth in this story is unknown: it might be an example of Crowley's joking at his own expense.

He realised from his mistakes the commonest errors made by those aspiring to magic and quickly appreciated that success depended upon the ability to awaken creative genius, which allowed the novice to act without conscious comprehension, beyond intellectual rationalisation. Magic, Crowley surmised, was an art rather than a science.

In *The Occult – A History* by Colin Wilson, published in 1971, Crowley's magical status is adequately summarised by declaring that he was a born magician, with strong animal faculties and sexual urges. Bearing this in mind, even those who would deride Crowley should consider that he believed magic was intrinsically linked to human will, which was itself usually suppressed in the individual because humans are passive and rely too much upon rational consciousness rather than instinctive interpretation. This reliance upon rationality is more than an assumption and certainly applies in the Western society in which Crowley lived. He considered – and one must believe rightly if one accepts his theories – that magic was a subconscious process, to which he turned instinctively rather than intellectually. For those who would dismiss Crowley's magic there is a question

to be answered: what is imagination? Crowley would suggest it was magic. In short, what he classed as magic would today be considered an amalgam of the subconscious, the imagination and the techniques of reaching through to control or communicate with them, often to be found in a psychiatrist's office.

To Crowley, magic was a complex, difficult matter to master. The practitioner had to be a genius, equipped with the relevant scientific knowledge, an open mind, sympathetic apprehension and ordinary common sense. In his case, mathematics and chemistry gave him the science he needed, creative writing the open-minded sympathy, while his practically minded brewing ancestry provided the last requirement.

It was not long before Jones, Crowley's magical tutor, realised that his pupil had considerable potential and suggested he put him forward for membership of a magical society in which he was an adept. It was called the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn or, to those in the know, simply the Golden Dawn or G∴D∴. The society to which A.E. Waite belonged, it was hermetic in that it was associated with the god Hermes. Crowley eagerly accepted and was subsequently introduced by Jones to the Golden Dawn leader, Samuel Liddell Mathers.

Mathers was a curious character. The Irish poet W.B. Yeats, who was a member of the Golden Dawn, considered him to be half lunatic, half knave. He was right. Mathers, fascinated by the revival in Celtic art and religion and for some reason a fervent Jacobite, claimed without justification to be MacGregor of Glenstrae, frequently calling himself MacGregor Mathers, Comte de Glenstrae. It was his contention that his surname had been used by the MacGregor clan after they were outlawed in 1603, his great-great-grandfather inheriting the Franco-Scottish title Count MacGregor of Glenstrae. He wore Highland dress, danced the sword dance, carried dirks tucked into his socks, and sported a sporran. That Mathers, the son of a clerk, had never visited Scotland, and did not do so until 1897, seems not to have fazed him.

The Golden Dawn itself had almost as much of a chequered and dubious history as its leader. It was essentially a Rosicrucian

order and, as such, drew its inspiration from Rosicrucianism, a secret European religion claiming as its forerunners the Knights Templar, Cathars and Albigensians. Constantly persecuted by the Christian Church, Rosicrucians believed they were the holders of arcane truths going back to ancient Egypt, which it was their responsibility to nurture and pass on to initiates.

By the late nineteenth century, the Golden Dawn was the most influential of the occult societies operating in Britain, founded as a reaction against the new atmosphere of scientific discovery, existentialism and materialism, and the piety of Victorian Christianity. Members either came directly to the Golden Dawn or moved over from Madame Helena Petrovna Blavatsky's Theosophical Society, founded in 1875, which was based more upon oriental religious traditions, because they thought the fundamental Indian and Tibetan religious imagery her organisation involved was inappropriate for a Western society. Central to Blavatsky's theosophy, and carried to the Golden Dawn by joining members, was the existence of an illustrious group of hermit-like men known as the Secret Chiefs, Mahatmas or Hidden Masters, who lived in a cave in the Himalayas and oversaw and orchestrated the activities – the fate – of mankind. Two of them, Koot Hoomi and Morya, had allegedly revealed themselves to Madame Blavatsky. They did not, however, prevent her from being accused of fraud by the Society for Psychical Research, and it was in the aftermath of this attack on her and theosophy that the Golden Dawn was founded.

There are a number of accounts of the foundation of the Golden Dawn, but the essence of the story is that some time around 1880, possibly in 1884, the Rev. Alphonsus Woodford, a writer on masonic matters, found an enciphered manuscript. Romantics say he picked it up from the second-hand book market which used to exist in Farringdon Road in London; others declare he found it in August 1887 in a collection of papers bequeathed to him by an occultist called Frederick Hockley. Unable to make head or tail of it, Woodford gave it to Dr William Wynn Westcott, a coroner in north London,

a student of the occult, a freemason who was a member of the Societas Rosicruciana in Anglia, an esoteric masonic Rosicrucian order, and a friend of Madame Blavatsky. Also shown the manuscript was Dr W.R. Woodman, another senior member of the same Rosicrucian society. What happened next was either that Westcott managed to interpret some fragments of five magical rituals written in a sixteenth-century artificial alphabet, or that both Woodman and Westcott drew a blank, showing the manuscript to Mathers.

A fellow member of the same masonic Rosicrucian order as Westcott, Mathers had spent some time in Paris translating one of the most famous works on magic, *The Key of Solomon*. Mathers deciphered the manuscript, which consisted of an ancient ritual of initiation and the true attribution of the trump cards in the tarot pack. The manuscript also included the identity and address of an adept called Fraulein Anna Sprengel, who lived in Nuremberg. In October 1887, Westcott wrote to her, receiving a reply the following month. Fraulein Sprengel happened to be the head of the Rosicrucian Lichte Liebe Leben Tempel (the Temple of Light, Love and Life) in Nuremberg, a city long associated with the foundation of secret fraternities and societies. She gave permission for Westcott, Woodman and Mathers to start up a similar society to hers.

Together, Mathers and Westcott cobbled together the rituals, added to them and wrote Knowledge Lectures to accompany them. Thus equipped, they opened the Isis-Urania Temple of the Hermetic Students of the Golden Dawn. The following March, a charter of incorporation arrived from Nuremberg. Fraulein Sprengel having inadvertently forgotten to sign it, Westcott did so in her name, using her magical name of Sapiens Dominabitur Astris: apparently, she had given him permission so to do. This caused some Anglo German friction for, when she died in 1890, Fraulein Sprengel's colleagues in Nuremberg were somewhat peeved that they had not been consulted in the setting up of an English chapter of their society and informed the London adepts that they would no longer give them any magical assistance but would pass on

sufficient knowledge for them to contact the Secret Chiefs on their own.

All of this, however, is now highly suspect. What most likely happened was that Westcott invented the whole thing, forging the manuscript and charter, possibly with the connivance of Woodman and Mathers, and Fraulein Sprengel never existed. Westcott's motivation was the desire to set up a rival organisation to the Theosophical Society. Whatever really happened is immaterial. By 1890, the Golden Dawn was well established and growing in size and influence.

The Golden Dawn was primarily concerned with ritual magic and the art of causing change by exercising human will. Members sought to acquire magical knowledge while a few actually wanted to practise magic.

To be a successful magician, one had to believe an individual could communicate with the universe as a whole and that, if properly disciplined, the human will was literally capable of anything it wished; that there were planes or levels of existence other than the physical; that there existed other intelligences apart from those who could be physical incarnations; and that humans were only partway up the ladder of psychical evolution.

Achieving communication with, or entering into, these other planes was effected by means of conducting an appropriate ceremony. In the case of the Golden Dawn, this was usually through hermetical ritual pertaining to the god Hermes. The act was known as invoking the god. Hermes is associated with the number eight, so the ritual would be illuminated by eight lights, the altar would be octagonal or stand in an octagon painted on the floor: food associated with Hermes since the time of the Greeks would be eaten. During the ceremony, the magician would transmit a beam of himself into the other planes of existence and, down it, receive the knowledge, strength or communication he was seeking. Basically, he was looking to change his consciousness in order to speak to other intelligences and gain from them the information or techniques required to exercise his own will.

At first, the Golden Dawn was little more than a small coterie of masonically associated, like-minded, would be magicians with a few women who were similarly interested: unlike most societies, women were admitted. Yet, under Mathers' leadership, all this was to change.

For some years, Mathers had been living frugally from hand to mouth, spending his time studying, but in 1890 he gained employment as librarian of the Horniman Museum at Forest Hill in south London. An eclectic ethnographic, natural history and musical instrument collection, it was established in the 1860s by Frederick John Horniman, a famous tea merchant and Liberal Member of Parliament for Falmouth and Penrhyn. Horniman offered Mathers the job at the insistence of his daughter, Annie, who had joined the Golden Dawn. Annie, whom friends nicknamed Tabbie, was a friend of Mathers' beautiful wife Mina Bergson, the sister of the philosopher Henri Bergson: they had been students together at the Slade School of Fine Art. Mathers and his wife, who was considerably younger than him, moved into Museum Lodge. No doubt Annie Horniman wished to help her friend out of the state of near poverty in which she was living. However, within a year, Mathers had quarrelled with Horniman over, among other things, the fact that he had lied about his age in the National Census, claiming he was fifteen years younger than he was. After he was evicted from the museum property, Annie Horniman continued to support both the Mathers financially for at least another five years.

In 1892, the Mathers moved to Paris, where they stayed first at 121 Boulevard St-Michel, later moving to 87 rue Mozart in the suburb of Auteuil. At this time, Mathers went under the name of Chevalier MacGregor. Rumour has it that Mathers, who married Mina Bergson in the library at the Horniman Museum, changing her name from Mina to Moina because it sounded more Scottish, never consummated the marriage because he thought fornication was an obstacle to magical development.

Moina Mathers was clairvoyant and, through her, Mathers claimed he was in communication with the Secret Chiefs. He allegedly met three of them one night in the Bois de Boulogne.

Once charged with the knowledge this trio gave him, Mathers returned to London, confronting Woodford and Westcott with it. He caught them by surprise, assured the membership of the Golden Dawn that he was in receipt of the truths handed to him and said the Secrets Chiefs had appointed him head of the society. In next to no time, he was sole leader. From this position of authority, he composed new rituals, wrote new manuscripts and set up an inner, second stratum for those adepts who were advancing in the order. No doubt his exalted position also ensured him some pecuniary reward.

The society was structured hierarchically. One entered the First (or Outer Order as a Neophyte then progressed to be a Zelator, Theoricus, Practicus and Philosophus, the last stage being exceedingly difficult to attain for to be there was to be in control of a lot of knowledge and on the brink of conversing with one's Holy Guardian Angel. Members went through a series of rites but did no serious magical work. The Second (Inner) Order could only be entered by invitation from the Secret Chiefs speaking through Mathers. While the First Order was mysterious, the second was positively secretive for, once in it, members received instruction in ritual magic.

Known as the Rosae Rubeae et Aurae Crucis, meaning the Rose of Ruby and the Cross of Gold, the Second Order consisted of three levels of achievement – Adeptus Minor, Adeptus Major and Adeptus Exemptus, above which came what is commonly called the Argentinum Astrum, of which no humans were members. Mathers, of course, got as high as Adeptus Exemptus. This was sufficient: he was at the highest point to which a human could aspire.

Once all this was in place, the Golden Dawn thrived. Under its mantle, it brought together a vast body of disparate magical material and forged it into a workable system within a society with an ordered structure of members and rituals offering instruction in magical theory and practice. By 1893, it had 170 active members, the number rising to 315 by 1896. The Isis Urania Temple (the headquarters temple, so to speak) held its ritual ceremonies at the Mark Mason's Hall in Great Queen

Street, London, the central lodge building for masons in a higher order of freemasonry. Other Golden Dawn societies existed out of London, such as the Osiris Temple in Weston-super Mare, the Horus Temple in Bradford, the Amen-Ra Temple in Edinburgh and the Ahathoor Temple founded by Mathers in Paris in 1894. Some did not last long, others endured. The Second Order in London which, by 1900, had sixty members, met in less salubrious surroundings at 26 Oakley Square near Euston Station, then at 36 Blythe Road. A room was hired at the Mark Mason's Hall for important ceremonies.

Initiation fees were ten shillings with an annual subscription of another ten shillings and, at meetings, a hat was passed round for donations. The money was banked by Mathers. A large number of people were initiated, for Mathers needed to build up the society's and his own income, but a fair proportion did not stay long. Most came from the upper middle class, with more than a smattering of nonentities and what today would be termed nutcases. Yet there were some genuinely interesting and important members as well.

The most illustrious of these was W.B Yeats, who had been interested in the occult, particularly black magic and satanism, since his early teens, forming his own small group, The Hermetic Society, in Dublin before moving to London in 1887. He first came across Mathers in the domed Reading Room of the British Museum where, he noted, 'I often saw a man of thirty-six, or thirty-seven, in a brown velveteen coat, with a gaunt resolute face and an athletic body, who seemed, before I heard his name, or knew the nature of his studies, a figure of romance.' Mathers invited Yeats to join the Golden Dawn in March 1890 and, in January 1893, admitted him to the Second Order with the society name of Frater Demon Est Deus Inversus (Brother the Evil Spirit Is God Reversed), which appealed to his interest in diabolism.

Membership may have been swelling the ranks of the Golden Dawn but so was dissension. Woodford died in 1891 and Westcott resigned, probably after being obliged to do so by Mathers, who was an arrogant autocrat, but certainly after

being informed by his employers that membership of an occult society was not compatible with being a state-appointed coroner. How the authorities came to learn about his secret membership is anyone's guess, but Westcott thought the information had been leaked by Mathers, who, still living mostly in Paris, was trying to rule his flock from afar with regular orders and encyclicals. Adepts given magical knowledge by Mathers were ordered to sign a pledge of personal obedience to him before they could advance: many did, yet no further preferments were made upon them and some suspected that Mathers' magical knowledge was limited. There were others who were not prepared to toe this line, who wanted to know where the money was going, and purists who questioned the validity of the rituals. Resignations and expulsions were frequent and acrimonious.

Mathers rubbed everyone up the wrong way. Even Annie Horniman fell out with him, to be expelled for insubordination in December 1896. She, concerned at Mathers' Jacobite sentiments, frequent drinking bouts and profligacy, cut off his financial assistance, although there was an underlying cause to their rift. Annie had quarrelled with Dr Edward Berridge, a homeopathic doctor and Golden Dawn member, whom she asked Mathers to expel. Berridge, however, was a friend of Mathers, who took his side. A body of members petitioned Mathers not to expel Annie but he ignored them. Henceforth, Mathers was always hard up and seeking to earn money as best he could.

One way he made a living was by selling Turkish railway shares on commission. Another was by staging magical ceremonies. It began when the ancient Egyptian goddess, Isis, appeared to him one night and ordered him to broadcast the fact of her divinity. Mathers turned one of the rooms in his apartment in rue Mozart into a temple to Isis and started putting on theatrical ceremonies in which he wore a long white gown with a belt engraved with the signs of the zodiac, sacred bracelets on his ankles and wrists and a leopard's skin over his shoulder. Moina wore a chiffon robe with a conical Egyptian hat and a lotus flower on her head. At first, the performances were put on just

for friends, but a journalist suggested that Mathers hold them in public. After a purported tussle with his conscience, Mathers agreed. He booked the intimate Théâtre Bodiniere at 18 rue Saint Lazare for the show. The stage bore a huge statue of Isis surrounded by lesser deities. An altar stood in front of them with a Tibetan lamp burning an eternal flame. Hierophant Rameses (Mathers) appeared out of the shadowy wings holding a spray of lotus flowers and a rattle, which he shook. Standing by the altar, he chanted some incantations from the Egyptian *Book of the Dead* before High Priestess Anari (Moina) materialised and invoked Isis. Following this, a French dancer performed the Dance of the Four Elements as a finale. There is no record of how many of these performances were given or how much they earned.

Crowley was initiated as a Neophyte into the Golden Dawn at the Mark Mason's Hall on 18 November 1898, certain he was about to learn the secrets of existence and eager to find a system into which to insert his magical ambitions. The experience was to shape the remainder of his life.

He entered his initiation with all the sincerity and gravity he felt the occasion called for, although he was disappointed that the ceremony took place in a freemasonic lodge building. He was also a little disenchanted on discovering that the members were mostly ordinary middle-class people. This minor setback was allayed, however, by the event itself. The rituals were impressive and contained what Crowley believed were the true formulæ. Through the sacramental nature of the ceremony, he saw himself entering the Hidden Church of the Holy Grail.

Before embarking upon the dramatic ritual, Crowley was dressed in a loose, ankle-length black robe with a hood completely covering his head while around his waist he had tied a triple-stranded cord. His right wrist was bound by cord, the end held by his guide, who would take him through the ceremony. He was then led into the temple where water was splashed on his hands and robe and incense was wafted about him. Still unable to see anything from under the hood, he was led to the altar, where he knelt and took the oaths of secrecy and fraternity required of him. The final oath threatened a terrible death if he broke

his word. After he had been further paraded round the temple, the hood was removed. Crowley was now addressed by three magicians, who formally received him into the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn. This accomplished, he was instructed in the society's secret signs, handshake and steps, then, after a brief imitation of holy communion, the ceremony ended. The similarities with the initiation into craft freemasonry are more than passing ones, even down to the final oath of secrecy. Had Crowley known of these he might well have been even more disappointed.

During the ceremony, Crowley was given his magical name which, as was the case with most such names, was also a sort of motto. It was Perdurabo, meaning The One Who Will Endure. It was, to say the least, predictive, although much of the rest of the ceremony was to be proved in time ineffectual. Crowley broke practically every oath yet never suffered the threatened terrible death by lightning bolt.

After the ceremony, Crowley was introduced to his fellow members. They were a distinct let down. In his opinion, they were mostly 'an abject assemblage of nonentities; the members of the Order were as vulgar and commonplace as any other set of average people', only Jones and Baker being scientifically educated. However, there were a few who counteracted the others' mundanity. W.B. Yeats was present, as was Florence Emery, a well-known actress whose stage name was Florence Farr. A.E. Waite, Algernon Blackwood the publisher and the novelist Arthur Machen were also members, albeit in some instances only briefly.

It might be said that Crowley's denigration of his peers was a typical exercising of his ego, and this may be true, but others also found them to be a motley band of nobodies. Maud Gonne, the Irish patriot and Fenian nationalist with whom Yeats was in love, who had joined the Golden Dawn in 1891, referred to the members as an 'awful set'. Florence Farr was, no doubt, of a different opinion. An official of the organisation and one time mistress of both Yeats and George Bernard Shaw, she was, it was said, unable to reject any advances made to her and had

sex with a number of the members including, rumour has it, Crowley himself.

Yet another disappointment concerned the standard of the secret knowledge Crowley was given and the Knowledge Lectures he had to attend. He knew much of the content already. This was not a case of him being egotistical. He had been reading around the subject of magic for months and was by now familiar with the sources from which much of the material originated. What was more, he found that what he was being 'taught' was readily available in books if one was keen enough to look for it.

As a result of his foreknowledge, intensity, eager scholarship and ability to learn quickly, Crowley rapidly progressed through the ranks. Within a month, he was made Zelator, within two Theoricus and, by February 1899, Practicus. As the rules demanded a three-month gap, he was not elevated to Philosophus until May. He would have gone straight on to the Second Order but his rise was blocked by the demand of a seven-month wait and the requirement that he be invited to join rather than automatically promoted.

It was at this point, a temporary hiatus in his magical progress, that Crowley turned his attention to the Operation of Abramelin, also referred to as the Operation of the Sacred Magic of Abramelin, the object of which was to gain knowledge of and converse with one's Holy Guardian Angel, thereby coming to know one's inner self. Crowley had been lent a copy of Mathers' book about Abramelin by Jones, who also instructed him in the preliminary steps of the Operation.

Abramelin was Mathers' mage, whom he had discovered in a manuscript in the Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal in Paris. According to Mathers, the manuscript about Abramelin was a book written by Abraham the Jew in 1458. He was a student of the occult, as were many fifteenth-century learned Jews, who travelled to Egypt to find a teacher in the secret traditions. There, he met another Jew called Aaron who, in turn, told him of the existence of a seer called Abramelin who, living at Arachi, possessed considerable occult knowledge. Abraham the Jew journeyed there, becoming

his pupil. In due course, now experienced in the science of Magic, he collected his knowledge into a book which was translated into French some time around 1700. It was this Mathers had stumbled upon and translated from the French. He was not the first to delve into Abramelin's book. Alphonse Louis Constant, who, under the alias of Eliphas Lévi, was fundamental to the revival of interest in magic in the nineteenth century, had read it, as had Edward Robert Bulwer, second Baron and first Earl Lytton, the novelist and Viceroy of India.

It was considered one of the most important magical treatises in existence and Crowley thought highly of it. He had come to realise that most rituals were either deliberately obtuse inventions or ancient adaptations of early Roman Catholic or Jewish traditions. *The Book of the Sacred Magic of Abra-Melin the Mage*, as it was entitled, was the exception. It was, he wrote,

> *written in an exalted style It is perfectly coherent; it does not demand fantastic minutiae of ritual or even the calculations customary There is nothing to insult the intelligence On the contrary, the operation proposed is of sublime simplicity The method is in entire accordance with this There are, it is true, certain prescriptions to be observed but these really amount to little more than injunctions to observe decency in the performance of so august an operation. One must take a house where proper precautions against disturbance can be taken; this being arranged, there is really nothing to do but to aspire with increasing fervour and concentration, for six months, towards the obtaining of the Knowledge and Conversation of the Holy Guardian Angel Once He has appeared, it is then necessary, first, to call forth the Four Great Princes of the Evil of the World; next, their eight sub-princes, and, lastly, the three hundred and sixteen servitors of these A number of talismans previously prepared, are thus charged with the power of these spirits By applying the proper talismans you can get practically anything you want*

There are two divisions to magic. One invokes the forces of good, the other of evil. These result in the terms white and black magic, respectively: the term 'black magician' is applied to those

who use these forces to selfish or evil ends. Abramelin taught that the forces of good (white) magic are superior to black, satanic forces and that all phenomena result from evil forces working under the influence of good. On occasion, however, they get away from the governance of good and wreak havoc. While on the loose, they can and do form pacts with men, holding the humans in their thrall. A man, being halfway up the spiritual ladder and balanced between the good and the bad, can be influenced by either his Holy Guardian Angel or a Malevolent Demon.

In order not to be put at risk by evil forces, a practising magician had to lead a pure life, contacting his Holy Guardian Angel by means of prayer or meditation in order to be instructed in how to counteract, or use to the effect of goodness, the Powers of Darkness. If the man failed in this, he would come under the control of the Malevolent Demons with the result that he would suffer and descend into hell.

The magic of Abramelin lists the angels and demons to be invoked and the talismans to be consecrated to, among other things, raise the dead, enable spiritual flying, create or quell storms, acquire or make gold and encourage lust between others. However, none of these can be achieved before the individual's Holy Guardian Angel appears to instruct the magician in magical methodology. This takes at least six months' preparation.

The concept of the Operation fascinated Crowley partly, he suggested, because of a commonplace event and remark that happened in his childhood but which remained firmly in his memory. He had been going somewhere with his parents and had reached a railway station. A large cabin trunk, being carried on the back of a station porter, slipped and the porter dropped it. It just missed knocking the young lad over. Had it fallen on him, it could have crushed him to death. Edward Crowley had remarked in passing that Alick's guardian angel must have been looking out for him that day. Now he was studying magic, the notion of a Holy Guardian Angel seemed to have substance.

Since going down from Cambridge, apart from when he was away on his travels or staying in the Hotel Cecil, Crowley

had been living with his mother. Now, with his involvement with matters magical, it was imperative he move into his own lodgings: he could hardly conduct the Operation in his room in his mother's house. Consequently, Crowley rented a flat at 67/9 Chancery Lane in the City of London. He signed the rental contract in the name of Count Vladimir Svareff. His motive for this deceit was, he said, to observe how people treated the upper classes – after all, he knew how they regarded young, middle-class men. He was also pandering to his ego and romantic imagination, and it was to be far from the last time he 'acquired' a title: additionally, when a new collection of poems, *Jezebel*, was published, he used this new pseudonym.

In the spring of 1899, while studying and preparing for the Abramelin Operation, Crowley met someone who was to have as much of an impact upon his life as Oscar Eckenstein. He was Allan Bennett.

Bennett was a member of the Second Order, having joined the Golden Dawn in 1894 and being invited by Mathers to rise to the next level the following year. Born in December 1872, the son of an engineer who had died when he was a boy, Bennett had been raised by his strict Roman Catholic mother. Bennett, the most highly esteemed member of the Golden Dawn, and Crowley met at a ceremony at Mark Mason's Hall. During the ritual part of the evening, Crowley was 'aware of the presence of a tremendous spiritual and magical force' which he realised, after the proceedings were over, emanated from Bennett, who came across the room and accused Crowley of 'meddling with the Goetia', by which Crowley understood he meant malign magical powers. Crowley neither admitted nor denied the charge, possibly because he was already working on the Abramelin material and felt guilty about it. Yet he was impressed by Bennett's perceptiveness.

An enigmatic and curious figure, Bennett wore his dark hair brushed forward above a wide brow. His eyes, beneath thick eyebrows, were piercing, while his nose was pointed and his skin pale. In later years, he shaved his head, accentuating his mystical appearance. His health was frail, for he suffered periodically from

bad bouts of asthma. To counteract the symptoms, he lived by a cycle of medication, during which he first took opium orally then, after a week or two, switched to injecting morphine. This gave way to cocaine, but when this started to cause him to hallucinate, he went on to inhaling chloroform. The congestion in his lungs by now removed, he would convalesce until his next asthma attack, when the cycle would recommence.

Perhaps because of his upbringing as well as his perpetual illness, Bennett 'regarded the pleasures of living (and, above all, those of physical love) as diabolical illusions devised by the enemy of mankind in order to trick souls into accepting the curse of existence', as Crowley put it, adding that Bennett 'never knew joy: he disdained and distrusted pleasure from the womb.' This could be taken two ways: when, in his mid-teens, Bennett had been told the facts of life, he was so repulsed by the act of copulation he decided that God had to be evil and henceforth believed that God's goodness was a myth.

Convinced of God's wickedness, he rejected his mother's Catholicism and turned to magic. By the age of eighteen, he had attained one of the highest possible states of mystical trance and considered himself to be a Buddhist. He possessed a magical wand made of almond wood and tipped with a golden five-pointed star set with a diamond, and was never without a lustre, a long glass prism which he used as a blasting rod. On one occasion, Crowley reported Bennett using this on a theosophist who doubted its powers. 'It took,' Crowley reported, 'fourteen hours to restore the incredulous individual to the use of his mind and his muscles.' As well as his abiding interest in magic, Bennett, who had trained as a chemist, also had a profound knowledge of electricity and the Hindu and Buddhist scriptures of which he was considered a scholar.

Certainly, Bennett was cultured and possessed a charismatic personality and powerful intellect. It was no wonder that Crowley was attracted to him. He also realised that Bennett could teach him more about magic than anyone else. What was more, he could do it quickly. Crowley was impatient to learn all he could, especially because he felt the teaching he

was receiving from the Golden Dawn was not moving at the pace he wished.

The day after their meeting, Crowley went to Bennett's lodgings just south of the Thames. He was shocked to find him living by his bootstraps in the home of another student of the occult called Charles Rosher. Crowley, being wealthy, offered him the hospitality of his own, more comfortable, apartment. The invitation was conditional upon Bennett agreeing to become Crowley's magical tutor. Bennett accepted.

Crowley was ecstatic. His search was over. He had now found the magical master he wanted. As he was to write in the second volume of his unabridged autobiography, published in 1929, he now had all the mentors he needed. The dedication to the book reads:

To Three Immortal Memories
Richard Francis Burton the perfect pioneer of spiritual and physical adventure
Oscar Eckenstein who trained me to follow the trail
Allan Bennett who did what he could.

Bennett moved in with Crowley and began to tutor him intensively in ceremonial magic. Crowley was a quick, avid pupil whom Bennett taught how to acquire, understand and apply magical knowledge. Together, they worked various ceremonies, invoked spirits and created talismans. Crowley was not supposed to have access to Mathers' manuscripts until he was in the Second Order but Bennett, breaking his oath, provided copies.

The kind of ceremonies he and Bennett conducted took an essentially common form. Initially, the magician invoked the chosen god by supplication, requesting that the god send an appropriate Archangel. Once the Archangel had arrived, he was asked to send an Angel (or Angels) 'of that sphere': in layman's terms, this was the area of the spirit world over which the god had control. When the Angel appeared, he was asked to provide access to a spirit to which, when the spirit was forthcoming,

the magician could issue a command to obtain knowledge or whatever else he was seeking.

As well as ceremonial magic, Bennett taught Crowley the operations of divination, the qabala, the arts of clairvoyance and 'skreighing [shrieking or screeching] in the spirit vision', geomancy, symbolism and, most importantly, the use and operation of tarot cards. It was a magical training like no other, a comprehensive foundation which underpinned all Crowley's magical skills.

It is apparent that they enhanced their magical activities with drugs. Bennett certainly used cocaine in achieving magical ends, for he stated as much in a notebook written at this time, and he had ready access to a wide variety of drugs because of his asthmatic condition. He used his medicinal supplies, as 1960s hippie parlance would have it, to expand his consciousness, which he had also sought to do before meeting Crowley by partaking of hallucinogenic plants and fungi.

Being informed by Bennett that there was an ancient tradition of drug use in magic, and of the existence of a truly magical drug which could unlock the doors of the consciousness, Crowley set out to find it. He was to experiment fearlessly throughout his life with everything he could lay his hands on from opium and cocaine to hashish and ether: nothing deterred him. He was as oblivious to the dangers of addiction as he was to syphilis and gave little mind to the risks of mental instability – even insanity – some drugs could cause, either in himself or in others. There was nothing illegal in this: a wide variety of what are today classed as prohibited drugs were readily available from pharmacies across Britain, for the Dangerous Drugs Act did not come into force until 1921. Crowley dismissed the concern of addiction because he said his moral rectitude would protect him: besides, the concept of addiction, known then as habituation, was little understood.

His search had a precise purpose. Crowley wanted to find the chemical capable of freeing the soul, leaving it open to magical intrusion by the gods and spirits. He did not, at first,

take drugs vicariously: in time, however, he became addicted and took them because he had no alternative.

Crowley believed that the taking of drugs – at least, the right 'magical' drug – should precede all magical ceremonies because they made access to mystical experiences all the easier. Whether these experiences were genuinely mystical or merely an altered perception of the taker's reality, an extension or review of his psyche, is perhaps irrelevant. What counted, and especially counted in Crowley's case, was the fact that he believed they were magical and he made use of the way in which they enabled him to re-examine his basic beliefs and values from a new viewpoint, reassessing the world from a magical or mystical perspective. One of the primary aims of his life was the extension of his consciousness by whatever means, applied separately or in combination.

With Bennett lodging with him, Crowley's flat became a hive of magical activity. Two of the rooms were fitted out as temples, one white and the other black. The former contained six forty-eight square foot mirrors to deflect the force of any invocation and retain it in the room while the latter, which Crowley seems hardly to have entered during Bennett's residence, keeping it only to maintain a magical equilibrium with the former, was little more than a large cupboard, containing a small altar supported by a negroid figure standing on its hands and a human skeleton which Crowley fed with blood and dead sparrows. Crowley's aim was to give the skeleton life, but he singularly failed. Both temples had a magic circle and pentagram drawn on the floor.

A description of how the flat must have appeared may be found in a short story Crowley wrote, entitled 'At the Fork of the Roads'.

> *the girl passed from the cold stone dusk of the stairs to a palace of rose and gold. The poet's rooms were austere in their elegance. A plain gold-black paper of Japan covered the walls, in the midst hung an ancient silver lamp within which glowed the deep ruby of an electric lamp. The floor was covered with black and gold of leopards' skins, on*

the wall hung a great crucifix in ivory and ebony . a skeleton that sat there, and blood stained all its bones Below it was the evil altar, a round table supported by an ebony figure of a negro standing upon his hands. Upon the altar smouldered a sickening perfume and the stench of the slain victims of the god defiled the air It was a tiny room, and the girl, staggering, came against the skeleton. The bones were not clean, they were hidden by a greasy slime mingling with the blood, as though the hideous worship were about to endow it with a new body of flesh.

The flat, not surprisingly, contained malevolent as well as benign forces. Crowley recorded leaving the flat one evening with Jones while the air was still vibrant with forces they had conjured up. As they went down to the street, they noticed semi-solid shadows on the stairs. When they returned later, they met a black cat on the stairs, found the door to the flat open, the furniture in disarray and semi-materialised beings marching round the room. It was then, as Crowley recorded in an essay, 'the fun began! Round and round the big library tramped the devils all the evening, an endless procession; 316 of them we counted, described, named, and put down in a book. It was the most awesome and ghastly experience I had known.' Visitors to the apartment were said to feel dizzy on entering. When Crowley finally vacated the flat, the removal men were reported to have been overcome. It was some time before the landlord could find a new tenant.

How long Bennett stayed in Crowley's flat is not known, but he was probably to live there until early in 1900. He was almost continuously ill, spending days in bed in a semi-stupor brought on by his drug use. Crowley frequently watched him wake from a doze, reach for his sponge and bottle of chloroform and knock himself out again. With Jones, Crowley came to the conclusion that Bennett needed to leave England to regain his health in a warmer climate. Bennett was not averse to going abroad. He believed his destiny lay in the East and Buddhism. However, he did not have the funds to buy the ticket. Crowley was reluctant to buy it for him. He believed giving money away would weaken

friendships and he rarely parted with actual currency, although he could be materially very generous to others: he housed Bennett for at least eight months.

Determined to help Bennett in kind if not in cash, Crowley and Jones invoked a spirit called Buer, who could heal the sick. They managed to raise a vision of him and rather optimistically asked him for Bennett's fare. A few days later, their request seems to have been met. Crowley received a letter from a woman called Laura Horniblow, with whom he had been conducting an affair. In his unabridged autobiography, he has written in the margin next to his account of this episode, 'nine times I kissed my lover in her sleep', while, farther down, he has added 'Aleister Crowley (for Laura H '. This woman, whom Crowley described as a 'seductive siren', was the wife of an army colonel serving in India. Crowley had called a halt to their affair after he started working on the Operation of Abramelin, during which he was supposed to remain celibate. She wrote wanting their dalliance to continue.

On receiving her letter, Crowley arranged to meet her. 'I cannot remember,' he recorded, 'how it came into my mind to do what I did, but I went to see her. She begged me to come back to her and offered to do anything I wanted.' Crowley, seeing an opportunity here, informed her she was being selfish and should do something to counteract it. He requested she give him a hundred pounds: it was not, he added, for his own use but for another of which he could not tell her. She dutifully paid up and, as Crowley put it, 'saved to humanity one of the most valuable lives of our generation.' Bennett's fare was paid and, early in 1900, he formally resigned from the Golden Dawn and left Britain for Colombo in Ceylon.

There is an aside to this episode. When Laura Horniblow paid over the money, Crowley declared he was being selfish by setting his needs above hers. She had, he declared, 'made a generous gesture; I could do no less.' In recompense, he took her to Paris for a fortnight where she – Crowley says – begged him to give her a living memory of their love. Abramelin clearly taking second place, Crowley reports he obliged, although he

was never to elaborate upon the fact, suggesting the event might be apocryphal. That Crowley felt not the slightest twinge of guilt using his mistress in this fashion is quite certain.

Bennett's influence upon Crowley cannot be underestimated. He set him up in his magical studies. Before his departure, he gave Crowley most of his magical notebooks, including, in one, the start of a qabalistic dictionary, in which sacred words were not listed alphabetically but by numerical value. However, when Bennett's influence was absent, Crowley seems to have let his learning slip somewhat and, abusing it, embarked upon a study of the less pleasant aspects of magic – the black. His raising with Jones of the marching demons had fascinated him and, at times, even those ceremonies and invocations he held in the white temple took on sinister undertones.

Laura Horniblow was not Crowley's only distraction from Abramelin and matters magical. In the summer of 1899, he went climbing in the Alps with Oscar Eckenstein. During this trip, he met a famous mountaineer by the name of Tom Longstaff, who judged Crowley's climbing as unconventional. 'I have seen him,' Longstaff recalled in his book on mountaineering exploits, *This My Voyage*, published in 1950, 'go up the dangerous and difficult right (true) side of the great icefall of the Mer de Glace below the Géant alone, just for a promenade. Probably the first and perhaps the only time this mad, dangerous, and difficult route had been taken.' At the same time, he and Eckenstein demonstrated the latter's 'claws', the crampons he was seeking to perfect. These allowed easy progress across black ice at a slope angle of 70 degrees without the need to cut ice steps. Not everyone was convinced of their value or safety and they were not accepted until 1908.

As well as climbing in the Alps, Crowley also spent some time that summer wandering about Scotland and the Lake District. He did some climbing, but he had an ulterior motive. He was searching for something. Something special.

5

A Place in the Mountains

In order to carry out the Abramelin rites, Crowley required what amounted to a magical building. The flat in Chancery Lane was insufficient to please Abramelin, who required a specific and unique place dedicated to him. The temple, preferably a self-contained building, had to be secluded, with its main entrance facing north. In front of the door had to be a terrace covered in fine sand at the end of which should be a lodge where evil spirits could gather. In all directions, there had to be windows to watch out for these evil spirits, which could not be approached until the Holy Guardian Angel had been invoked.

Crowley had sufficient money to buy the building if he could find it. He scoured Britain in vain until the end of August 1899. While staying near Foyers, on the south shore of Loch Ness, Crowley suddenly saw the ideal building. It was called Boleskine Lodge or, in Gaelic, Baile os-ceann, meaning the homestead above.

Although Crowley referred to it as a manor house, Boleskine was in fact a handsome, substantial building with two double storey wings connected by a single storey spine containing the main reception rooms and a long corridor running the length of the house. With columns and a grand main entrance, albeit not facing north, it was built above the road which, to this day, is in places only one vehicle wide. The ground in front sloped sharply down to the loch, of which it afforded a magnificent panorama, while, immediately behind, crags of rock rose vertically for 150 feet before dipping to a small glen, Gleann Liath. In addition

to the main building there were also a small stone gatehouse, a separate domestic dwelling called the Brown Lodge below the road, a boathouse on the loch shore and a coach house. The grounds extended to about thirty-four acres, laid in part to formal gardens but mostly to lawn, grass paddock, rough moor and woodland.

Enquiring who the owner was, and discovering it was a woman called Mary Rose Burton, Crowley paid her a visit. He expressed his wish to purchase Boleskine. She replied that it was not for sale. Crowley made her an offer she would have been stupid to refuse. On 17 November 1899, Crowley, having paid £2,300 plus another £700 in settlement of an outstanding bond on the property, owned what was described as 'that piece of ground forming part of the estate of Lovat consisting of the old glebe of Boleskine lying within the parishes of Boleskine and Abertarff'. The price was at least twice the current value. The property was purchased in the name of Aleister MacGregor, of 87 rue Mozart, Paris, which was Mathers' address.

The building running north-east to south-west, Crowley dedicated the south-western portion to his magical work, placing the required north facing door in a bow window before which he laid out the necessary terrace covered in sand collected from the loch shore. Within the room that was the temple he placed his oratory, a wooden structure in which the mirrors from the London flat were hung.

Once in residence, Crowley took on the lifestyle – and airs and graces – of a Highland laird. He fished for salmon in the loch, shot grouse through the winter season of 1899/1900 and rabbits and clay pigeons out of it, strolled about on the mountains behind the house, and stalked deer. He was caught in a rowing boat on the loch during a storm, only just making shore in time, and, on a number of occasions, was stranded on the opposite bank, his house a mile away as the crow flew but thirty by foot or cart. He trained one of his three dogs, Lady Etheldreda, to follow him when he climbed, but this plan went awry as the animal took to worrying hill farmers' sheep,

necessitating her repatriation to London. When the winter snows fell, Crowley took to cross-country skiing over the moors and glens. He also employed a gatekeeper-cum-coachman and a butler as well as other domestics, and entertained a steady stream of guests. If the occasion demanded, he hired a piper.

Like Mathers, Crowley took to wearing Highland dress, including a kilt made of MacGregor tartan: he admired the MacGregors whom he considered 'the most royal, wronged, romantic, brave and solitary of the clans', and taking the name may have reminded him of his childhood games with Cousin Gregor, in which he had played the famous chieftain, Rob Roy. As Crowley had a lifelong distaste for underwear, he no doubt took to wearing his kilt in the traditional manner. He topped off this move towards going native with a title. He referred to himself as Aleister Crowley MacGregor (sometimes just Aleister MacGregor), Lord of Boleskine and Abertarff, although this was later shortened to the plain, more impressive-sounding Lord Boleskine. His writing paper was embossed with a coronet above a gilded *B*; his notepaper was decorated with coats of arms and a Sanskrit saying.

Throughout most of his life, Crowley also laid claim to a knighthood, calling himself Sir Aleister Crowley. Where this came from no one knows for certain, but Crowley claimed that, while at university, he had been a member of a Carlist conspiracy to return the pretender, Don Carlos, to the Spanish throne, allegedly receiving military training and a knighthood conferred upon him by one of Don Carlos's presumably noble followers. In his autobiography, Crowley alludes to the matter several times but never fully addresses it. As many of the Carlist movement's activities took place before Crowley could have joined them, he may well have been covering his lie (or, more probably, joke) with modest dismissal.

While he may have self-ennobled himself a few times, Crowley displayed an ardent dislike of real knighthoods. He later came to believe too many were appointed, cheapening the honour, and that they were given to too common a set of folk, such as film stars. 'When renegade Jews and clowns walk into

dinner before gentlemen, the latter may prefer to go without,' he opined. A knighthood concerned 'being a man of honour, of having taken the vows – to uphold the right, to serve mankind, to protect the distressed, and generally to exercise the manly virtues.' As his notoriety spread over the years, it was said that Crowley had also styled himself as the Earl of Middlesex, Count Von Zonaref (probably a misinterpretation of Svareff) and the King of Ireland. How many of these were actual pseudonyms and how many editorial inventions chasing newspaper sales is debatable.

Crowley's arrival in Boleskine unnerved the local inhabitants, but not, at least initially, on account of his magic. What really worried them were his nocturnal wanderings about the countryside. Early one morning, he discovered a stone flagon of moonshine whisky left overnight on his doorstep, a tacit request for him not to betray the illicit stills in the mountains to the excise men. The distillers need not have worried. Crowley's attitude to the legal system was ambivalent: the law defended the victim and brought him justice but it was also an ass, enforcing petty rules to foil the harmless activities of innocent men, often accelerating a simple situation into a more serious one, driving good men to subterfuge.

Among his diurnal visitors were all Crowley's mountaineering chums, who came to stay and climb. A regular guest was Oscar Eckenstein, who was, at this time, interesting himself in the concept of flight. In collaboration with a Trinity College mathematics scholar, Gilbert Thomas Walker (also known among his contemporaries as 'Boomerang' Walker), he constructed a number of boomerangs, each with differently shaped surfaces allowing them special flight characteristics. The two of them and Crowley went so far as to design a ramp, rather like a ski jump, down the steep hillside next to Boleskine: one of them was to go headlong down this on a bicycle fitted with wings to see if it might glide. A launch would be on stand-by on the loch to retrieve man and machine. The plan fortunately never came to fruition.

Another house guest was possibly Laura Hornblow. Crowley

records having the woman whom he had 'made happy' come to live with him until the spring of 1900, at which time, he hoped, his obligations would end. The implication is that she was pregnant but this is far from being a certainty. In any case, she did not stay the course but returned to London.

Crowley revelled in Boleskine. It was ideally situated for magical purposes, it afforded him a lairdship (of sorts) and it was an excellent place in which to entertain. Yet there was more to it than that. Crowley was in awe of the dramatic landscape, the sharp, dark hills and the moody waters of the loch, one of the deepest stretches of land-locked water in Europe, rumoured to be home to a prehistoric monster, and the stark, jagged ruins of Urquhart Castle three miles north on a spit on the opposite shore. It all appealed to his romantic notions of his ancestry. A poem Crowley wrote sums up his thoughts on Boleskine. Entitled 'The Hermit's Hymn to Solitude', it includes the lines:

I sate upon the mossy promontory
Where the cascade cleft not his mother rock,
But swept in whirlwind lightning foam and glory,
Vast circling with unwearying luminous shock
To lure and lock
Marvellous eddies in its wild caress ...

The subject of the poem, the Falls of Foyers situated one and a half miles from Boleskine, was also the cause of a protest Crowley voiced against the British Aluminium Company, which was planning to use the falls to provide hydroelectric power for its plant in Fort Augustine. Voicing sentiments well ahead of their time, Crowley fulminated, 'Money-grubbing does its best to blaspheme and destroy nature.' The plan went ahead nonetheless.

For all Crowley's playing the laird, his real purpose at Boleskine through the winter of 1899 and the spring of 1900 was magic and the keeping of an oath to carry out Abramelin's Operation, which could only be commenced around Eastertime

each year. It was a wordy undertaking: 'I, Perdurabo [it began], in the Presence of the Lord of the Universe, and of all Powers Divine and Angelic, do spiritually bind myself, even as I am now physically bound unto the Cross of Suffering.' There followed ten lengthy clauses of obligation after which came:

> *Furthermore, I most solemnly promise and swear, to acquire this Holy Science in the manner prescribed in the Book of Abra-Melin, without omitting the least imaginable thing of its contents, not to gloss or comment in any way on that which may be or may not be, not to use this Sacred Science to offend the Great God, nor to work ill unto my neighbour: to communicate it to no living person, unless by long practice and conversation I shall know him thoroughly, well examining whether such an one really intendeth to work for the Good or for the Evil. I will punctually observe, in granting it, the same fashion which was used by Abra-Melin to Abraham. Otherwise, let him who receiveth it draw no fruit therefrom. I will keep myself as from a Scorpion from selling this Science. Let this Science remain in me and in my generation as long as it shall please the Most High.*

The magic Crowley embarked upon was primarily of a visionary nature. In his autobiography, he gives examples, one of which reads:

> *In bed I invoked the Fire angels and spirits on the tablet, with names, etc., and the 6th Key. I then (as Harpocrates) entered my crystal. An angel, meeting me, told me, among other things, that they (of the tablets) were at war with the angels of the 30 Aethyrs, to prevent the squaring of the circle. I went with him unto the abodes of Fire, but must have fallen asleep, or nearly so. Anyhow, I regained consciousness in a very singular state, half consciousness being there, and half here. I recovered and banished the Spirits, but was burning all over, and tossed restlessly about – very sleepy, but consumed of Fire! Only repeated careful assumption*

of Harpocrates' god-form enabled me to regain my normal state. I had a long dream of a woman eloping, whom I helped, and after, of a man stealing my Rose Cross jewel from a dressing-table in an hotel. I caught him and found him a man weak beyond the natural (I could bend or flatten him at will), and then the dream seemed to lose coherence. I carried him about and found a hairbrush to beat him, etc etc. Query: Was I totally obsessed? Invoking the angels of Earth I obtained wonderful effect. The angel, my guide, treated me with great contempt and was very rude and truthful. He showed me divers things. In the centre of the earth is formulated the Rose and Cross. Now the Rose is the Absolute Self-Sacrifice, the merging of all in the o (Negative), the Universal Principle of generation through change (not merely the femmine), and the Universal Light 'Khabs'. The Cross is the Extension or Pekht principle. Now I should have learned more, but my attention wandered. This closes the four elemental visions· prosecuted, alas! with what weakness, fatuity and folly!

Other instances included his outwardly projecting his own image then transferring his consciousness to it, and allowing himself to magically 'travel' and take on other forms. Interestingly, the journeys were often rich with Christian imagery. On at least one occasion, he became Christ crucified.

As in his London flat, Crowley also experienced physical phenomena.

While I was preparing the talismans, squares of vellum inscribed in Indian ink, a task which I undertook in the sunniest room in the house [he noted in his autobiography], *I had to use artificial light even on the brightest days. It was a darkness which might almost be felt. The lodge and terrace, moreover, soon became peopled with shadowy shapes, sufficiently substantial, as a rule, to be almost opaque. I say shapes; and yet the truth is that they were not shapes properly speaking. The phenomenon is hard to describe. It was as if the faculty of vision suffered some interference, as if the objects*

of vision were not properly objects at all. It was as if they belonged to an order of matter which affected the sight without informing it.

Conducting Abramelin's magic was a risky business, for Crowley was incapable of controlling the evil spirits supposedly residing in the lodge. They – Oriens, Paimon, Ariton and Amaimon – and their 111 servitors broke out, entered the house and played merry hell within. Others were affected by all this magical carrying on. Charles Rosher, who was staying in Boleskine, could not stand it: he left one morning, without bidding his host goodbye, on the first steamer from Foyers to Inverness; they were to have no contact again for many years and the Boleskine experience was never again mentioned. The person who took Rosher's place, for Crowley needed a companion in these practices, also panicked and, when Crowley had to go away for ten days, Laura Horniblow seized the opportunity and took flight.

Further casualties arose. The gatekeeper-cum-coachman was one. Crowley returned from a rabbit-shooting outing to discover a Roman Catholic priest sitting in his study, who reported that the unfortunate man, a teetotaller for many years, had suddenly got blind drunk and attempted to murder his family. A clairvoyant on a visit from London abandoned her calling for prostitution, a housekeeper did a moonlight flit, one of the workmen employed to redecorate the house went berserk and tried to kill Crowley, while the butcher in Foyers accidentally severed an artery in the course of preparing a joint of meat and bled to death. This latter mishap appears to have been somewhat apocryphal. It has been claimed that Crowley either cast a hex upon the man in complaint at his charges or absent-mindedly happened to jot down the names of two demons on a bill: another attribution of this episode places the responsibility at someone else's door altogether.

Despite being magically busy, Crowley paid much attention to his literary career, producing a number of works such as *An Appeal to the American Republic*, prompted by meeting two Americans on the Geneva to Paris train, *Carmen Saeculare*, inspired by a

vision, the Baudelaire-influenced *The Temple of the Holy Ghost*, *The Mother's Tragedy* (a stylistic amalgam of Bulwer Lytton and Ibsen) and *The Fatal Force*. In the latter, a high priestess marries her own son and has a boy by him so as to focus her occult powers in the offspring. It was not an original idea, as Crowley was to later discover reading Eliphas Levi, who reported that ancient Persian magicians had done likewise. That he had come up with the same idea as Lévi, supported by other facts such as Lévi having died when Crowley was a three-month-old foetus, prompted Crowley into believing that he was a reincarnation of the Frenchman.

With the 1901 publication of *The Soul of Osiris*, written in 1900, Crowley started to receive some serious literary criticism. The *New York Nation* was complimentary, as was the *Western Morning News*, which declared Crowley a poet of promise but one whose 'genius has yet to unfold.' G.K. Chesterton, whose star was fast rising in the literary firmament, wrote a long article in the *Daily News*, concluding that Crowley was a strong, genuine poet, although he slapped him down by continuing, 'he will work up from his appreciation of the Temple of Osiris to that loftier and wider work of human imagination, the appreciation of Brixton Chapel.'

This encouragement notwithstanding, Crowley's abiding ambition was to rise higher in the Golden Dawn, and he duly applied for promotion, approaching W.B. Yeats and other senior society members: yet, at Yeats's prompting, they turned Crowley down. Yeats disliked this upstart, condemning Crowley for conducting magical ceremonies he believed should not be undertaken by anyone until they were installed in the Second Order. Furthermore, Yeats disliked Crowley as a person and was definitely peeved that Bennett had given him access to what he considered 'closed' documents.

Taken aback by this rebuttal, Crowley rejoined that he had received permission from the Chief – in other words, Mathers – to be elevated. This was a lie. In any case, it cut no ice, as Yeats and the others in London were in conflict with Mathers in Paris and had made their minds up about Crowley, whom

Yeats classed as an unspeakable degenerate, his opinion based on rumours of Crowley's active homosexuality.

Throughout his working on the Abramelin material, Crowley kept a diary entitled *The Book of the Operation of the Sacred Magic of Abramelin the Mage being the account of the events of my life with notes on the Operation, by Perdurabo an humble Aspirant thereto*. His entry for 24 February 1900 is alarming. In it, he summarises a train of events that had started the previous November. Shortly before Crowley moved into Boleskine, Laura Horniblow received an anonymous letter telling her that Crowley was under police surveillance and advising her to have nothing to do with him. At about the same time, a woman called Evelyn Hall, with whom Crowley had been sleeping, gave him an identical warning. Quite possibly, the police were building a case on Crowley's and others' homosexual activities. Certainly, homosexuality was currently on Crowley's mind, even if he was not practising it. In the same diary, he relates a dream he had:

> *I was playing billiards and cut the cloth badly. I was with a publisher going through my work. He put aside a piece called 'The King's Tragedy' as especially valuable. He made indecent advances. I would not that we had actually published my things. His wife was a wonderful evil woman. A very flushed deep red complexion and moustache and beard. These white and black mixed. After dinner with her we went into a strange Oriental room and slaves brought a wonderful Wine. One of these slaves was a pale buxom boy with woman's breasts and him I touched on the anus. And another touched me there also. And I think a great debauch must have followed.*

It is not beyond the bounds of reason to assume that Crowley escaped arrest simply by coincidentally moving to the wilds of Scotland.

Snubbed by Yeats, for whatever reason, Crowley decided to go over the Irishman's head, appealing directly to Mathers. On 13 January 1900, he went to Paris, where Mathers agreed to initiate him into the Second Order, either on the grounds that he saw Crowley as a potentially important magician, or because

he wanted to get back at Yeats and the London members, or because Crowley was a source of initiation fees. Three days later, on 16 January, Crowley became a fully fledged Adeptus Minor in the Second Order. To rub salt into Yeats's wounds, Mathers told Crowley to demand of him the documents now due to him.

After returning to Boleskine on 7 February, seeing to the preparations for the Abramelin Operation and taking in some skiing with Eckenstein, who appears not to have been affected by the cohorts of shadowy spirits running amok round the house, Crowley wrote off to London for the documents. His correspondent was Miss Maude Cracknell, who was in charge of the administration and to whom Crowley later referred as 'an ancient Sapphic Crack, unlikely to be filled.' Miss Cracknell was unobliging and stalled him.

In the meantime, the atmosphere within the Golden Dawn grew even more stressed, Crowley's promotion increasing the tension between London and Paris. The despotic, secretive and paranoid Mathers no longer had the confidence of his British colleagues. Florence Farr, whom Mathers had made his sole London representative on the assumption that a woman would be less likely to seek his overthrow, did her diplomatic best to calm troubled waters, but she was caught between two intractable extremes. At a loss as to how to proceed, she suggested closing the London end of the Golden Dawn and offered her resignation to Mathers. He refused to shut down the operation: he needed initiates and the money they would bring. As for her resignation, Mathers made that redundant by dismissing her on grounds of creating a schism in the Golden Dawn.

Mathers had one main worry: it was that the London branch would throw him out, reinstalling Westcott in his place. To attempt to forestall this event, he wrote to Florence Farr, telling her that Westcott was a fraud who had invented the correspondence with Anna Sprengel: possibly he had invented her too. The Golden Dawn convened a committee to look into this: if it were true, their viability, indeed their very existence, was in doubt.

Things were coming to a head. On 25 March, Crowley was informed that his initiation into the Second Order had not been ratified and there would be no documents forthcoming. It was by now clear to him the London members were in revolt against Mathers. Predictably, Crowley sided with Mathers, of whom he said, somewhat sycophantically, 'he was unquestionably a Magician of extraordinary attainment. He was a scholar and a gentleman. He had that habit of authority which inspires confidence because it never doubts itself. A man who makes such claims as he did cannot be judged by conventional codes and canons. Ordinary morality is only for ordinary people.' He wrote to him in Paris, offering to put himself and, rashly, his fortune at Mathers' disposal, even if it meant abandoning Abramelin for the time being.

More acrimonious correspondence drifted to and fro across the English Channel until, on 29 March, Mathers was overthrown. On receiving the news, Mathers was livid. He threatened the putative committee with punitive magical force, then, in a letter dated 2 April, announced, 'I do not recognize the right of the Second Order either to elect a committee without my authorization and consent ... I *annul* the committee and I *annul* the Resolutions passed at the meeting of the 24th of March 1900.'

When word reached Crowley, he immediately left Boleskine for London, where he confronted the despised Sapphic Crack at the Second Order headquarters at 36 Blythe Road, Hammersmith, demanding access to the Vault, or ceremonial room. She refused. Journeying on to Paris, Crowley and Mathers met to plot.

The plan was simple. Mathers told Crowley to go back to London as his personal envoy, at the same time giving him a few magical tips on how to counteract any animosity. Once there, he was to summon the Second Order members, individually, into his presence: Crowley would be disguised in a mask. He was to pose them two seminal questions concerning their belief in the doctrine of their grade and their loyalty to Mathers. If he received negative answers he would, on the spot, either demote or expel them. Crowley was also charged with reconsecrating the

Vault, ordering masks to be worn henceforth in ceremonies, and giving a similar set of instructions to First Order members.

Crowley, no doubt anticipating promotion to the chief Adept position in Britain, went along with the plan, which was sure to be provocative. The last person the London members would accept as Mathers' representative was Crowley.

On 13 April, Crowley arrived back in London, brimming with magical power. Horses reared and bolted at his approach and his raincoat apparently spontaneously combusted.

Three days later, Crowley visited 36 Blythe Road, where the Second Order occupied rented rooms on the first floor. Crowley, convincing the landlord that he had permission, was given access. He inspected the locks and the Vault. Based upon the design of the fifteenth-century tomb of Christian Rosenkreutz, it was a wooden structure five feet wide and eight high, the interior lavishly decorated with seven-pointed stars, magical symbols, the Paths and Sephiroth of the Tree of Life, a triangle containing the twenty-two-petalled Rose and an assortment of other images, all painted in rich colours. Used to initiate Second Order members, it meant a lot to Mathers, who could not bear it being in the possession of his enemies.

The following day, Crowley and Elaine Simpson, a Golden Dawn member known as Sister Fidelis, whom he had persuaded to support Mathers' cause, returned to Blythe Road. Finding Miss Cracknell present, they proclaimed possession of the rooms and threw her out. She beetled off to the nearest post office and cabled Edward A. Hunter, a senior member of the Second Order. In the meantime, Crowley had a locksmith change the locks on the doors.

By the time Hunter arrived, he was faced with a *fait accompli*. He and Crowley exchanged words, then Florence Farr appeared. Crowley stood his ground and she called the police. A constable turned up, heard all the arguments and ordered Crowley to leave, which he did.

Two days passed. On the morning of 19 April, Hunter and Yeats went to Blythe Road to berate the landlord for letting Crowley in. They changed the locks back. Suddenly, around late

morning, Crowley walked up. He was dressed in full Highland kit, his kilt swinging, a huge gilt cross on his chest and a dirk in a sheath on his belt. He also wore a black mask. At his side was Elaine Simpson. Hunter informed Crowley that he was not welcome and should go. Crowley replied that he had Mathers' permission to be present, producing a verbose document to prove it. The stalemate ended when another policeman arrived, probably sent for this time by Crowley, who believed he was in the right. The policeman, however, suggested that Crowley leave, which, after about half an hour, he did. No sooner had he and his companion departed than a public house bouncer arrived. He had been hired by Crowley as muscle but had got lost on his way to Blythe Road.

The whole business was, in 1935, fictionalised by Dion Fortune, the pen name of a one-time Golden Dawn member called Violet Firth, in a novella called *The Winged Bull* Hugo Astley (Crowley) is the pockmarked, mulatto villain while Ted Murchison, a rugby player and boxer (Hunter), is the hero. They first meet when Astley breaks into a London flat but Murchison throws him down the stairs ('If ever the Prince of Darkness appeared in human form, he was sitting on the door-mat now') and realises he has just had his hands on a famously loose-living, debauched black magician. Many of the 'facts' Fortune drew upon for her story were sourced from tabloid scandal sheets.

The Mathers supporters absent, a meeting of the Second Order was hurriedly convened that afternoon. Edward Berridge, Elaine Simpson and her mother, Alice (who was also a member of the Order, whom Crowley described as 'a sixth-rate singer, a first-rate snob, with dewlaps and a paunch; a match-maker, mischief-maker, maudlin and muddle-headed. The ghastly hag put it all round London and New York that I had entered her daughter's room at night in my Body of Light'), were suspended. Crowley was not mentioned as they did not consider him a member of the Second Order, and a motion was passed that 'no person shall be deemed to belong to the London branch who has not been initiated by that body in London.'

Without further ado, Crowley started legal proceedings. A

letter written by Yeats on 25 April to his friend, Lady Isabella Augusta Gregory, summed the situation up:

> *Having failed in this he* [Crowley] *has taken out a summons on the ground that he is Mathers' 'envoy', and that there is nothing in the constitution of the Society to enable us to depose Mathers. Charles Russell, the son of the Lord Chief Justice, is acting for us, and is trying to keep my name out of the business. The case comes on next Saturday and for a week I have been worried to death with meetings, law and watching to prevent a sudden attack on the rooms. For three nights I did not get more than 4½ hours sleep any night. The trouble is that my Kabbalists are hopelessly unbusinesslike and thus minutes and the like are in complete confusion. I have had to take the whole responsibility for everything, to decide on every step. I am hopeful of the result. Fortunately the wretched envoy has any number of false names and has signed the summons in one of them. He is also wanted for debt and a trade union representative is to attend court on Saturday. The envoy is really one Crowley, a quite unspeakable person. He is I believe seeking vengeance for our refusal to initiate him.*

Crowley's opinion of Yeats was even lower. He described him as a 'lank dishevelled Demonologist who might have taken more pains with his personal appearance without incurring the reproach of dandyism', whose poetry he dismissed because 'it seemed to me to lack virility.' A good deal of Crowley's animosity was based upon Yeats's coolness towards his poetry. Crowley had shown Yeats the proofs of *Jephthah* but the Irishman had been less than enthusiastic: indeed, in 1915 he was to write to a friend that he thought Crowley had 'written about six lines, amid much bad rhetoric, of real poetry.' Another factor held against Yeats was his, as Crowley saw it, patriotic Irish pretentiousness, which he believed was doing the Irish nationalist cause harm.

What was more, Crowley believed Yeats was doing magic against him. He later attributed the spiritual havoc in his Chancery Lane lodgings to 'the evil work of others in the

Order, such as E.F.E.J. who, envious of his [Crowley's] progress and favour with the Chiefs, were attempting to destroy him.' In an annotated copy of the magazine in which this comment appeared, held by the Warburg Institute in London, Crowley has identified Yeats with the initials.

This hostility towards Yeats also manifested itself in Crowley's writing. 'At the Fork of the Roads' was, Crowley remarked, 'in every detail a true account of one episode of this period.' In the story, W.B. Yeats is Will Bute (a 'long lank melancholy unwashed poet' and 'dabblet in magic' who had a 'black jealousy of a younger man and a far finer poet' which 'gnawed at his petty heart') while Althœa Gyles (an artist and one-time mistress of Yeats) is Hypatia Gay, Crowley is Count Swanoff, Allan Bennett is Swanoff's Master and Leonard Smithers is the Publisher. Underpinning the narrative is the real affair, which had scandalised London bohemian society the year before, between Althoea Gyles and Smithers, who is portrayed in the tale as 'bloated with disease and drink; his loose lips hung in an eternal leer; his fat eyes shed venom; his cheeks seemed ever on the point of bursting into nameless sores and ulcers.' Towards the end of the story, Hypatia Gay is cast under a spell and fornicates with a slimy skeleton, such as Crowley maintained in his flat, is repulsed by Bute and returns to the Publisher, who, seeing her degradation, 'licked his lips.' Crowley was taking revenge for the alleged loss of the *Green Alps* manuscript in the printing works fire. Nor did his literary revenge end there. In his novel *Moonchild*, published in 1929, Crowley portrayed Yeats as Gates, a filthy Irish poet with grimy fingernails.

Crowley's legal action consisted of applying to a police magistrate for the surrender of the Vault, which he believed rightfully and, more pertinently, legally belonged to Mathers. The summons, which he signed as Edward Aleister, named Florence Farr and accused her of 'unlawfully and without just cause detaining certain papers and other articles the property of the Complainant.' The Second Order was represented by a noted Queen's Counsel called Gill, whose fee was met by Annie Horniman. Yeats was very worried at the possible outcome of

the hearing. If Crowley won it would, as Yeats wrote to Lady Gregory, give him, 'a person of unspeakable life, the means to carry on a mystical society, which will give him control of the consciences of many.'

As it turned out, Yeats had nothing to worry about. The case did not get to court. Either Crowley withdrew it when he saw the strength of the opposition or the magistrates' court rejected it because the value of the property being contested exceeded their remit. Another interpretation is that Charles Russell had employed a detective to delve into Crowley's background, discovering he had a number of bad debts and calling an official of a trades protection society (a sort of credit reference-cum-debt-collecting agency) to testify against him. Crowley, not wanting any of his dirty (possibly homosexual) laundry washing in public, backed down, settled out of court and paid five pounds in costs awarded against him. Needless to say, claims that magical influences had been brought to bear by both sides were bandied about.

When the legal dust had settled, Mathers and his envoy were even more out on a limb than before. Within days, the Golden Dawn membership gathered at Blythe Road and formally expelled Mathers. Yeats addressed the meeting with reconstructive proposals and emerged as the new leader. For another twenty years, he remained associated with the Second Order but, even under his command, it soon disintegrated once more into internecine strife.

The lawsuit may have been over, but Yeats was still obsessed with Crowley. He slept badly, had nightmares and lived in fear of the belief that Crowley had put a contract out on him with a gang of thugs from south London. He told a friend that Crowley had made a wax doll of him and was sticking pins in it; Crowley was far too sophisticated and experienced in magic to resort to such primitivity. As for Mathers, he continued to work on his magical studies, especially concerning the tarot, but he was a broken, disappointed man. Crowley recognised that Mathers was 'an expert Magician, and had become accustomed to use The Greater Key of Solomon with excellent effect.

He did not realise that Abra-Melin was an altogether bigger proposition . . .'

By the time the legal matters were finally concluded, the summer had arrived. The opportunity to carry out the Abramelin Operation at Boleskine had been missed, so Crowley saw little point in returning to Scotland. He went to Paris to let Mathers know the outcome of the situation and, while there, met two friends of Mathers who had recently been in Mexico. Crowley heard their talk of the country and resolved to go there to – as he put it – climb volcanoes. Arrangements were made and he set sail for New York in late June.

Throughout his early life, Crowley loved to travel and often did so on an impulse. Yet his decision to go to Mexico may have been influenced by the fact that the police wanted to question him. The instigator behind this was Laura Horniblow.

Some time in March, she had written a threatening letter to Crowley. What prompted this is open to conjecture. Possibly she had been annoyed at having been left in the spirit infested Boleskine; perhaps she was simply having second thoughts about having given money to Crowley for Bennett's fare to Ceylon, and wanted or needed the money back. Yeats said some of the Golden Dawn members had contacted her astrally and told her to cause Crowley trouble.)

Whatever the truth, she went to the police with the story of her life with Crowley, not withholding the lurid details, which allegedly included torture and bizarre sexual acts including sodomy. The police took an interest in the account but, as Laura Horniblow refused to testify in public, either from shame or to avoid her husband knowing what she had been up to in his absence, no case was made and the matter was dropped. The damage was done, however. Crowley was now 'known' to the police and a file was opened on him, although it was, from the start, riddled with inaccuracies.

This catalogue of misfortunes had meant the abandonment of the Abramelin Operation, which is a work of theurgy, or higher magic. To successfully execute it required a considerable purity of mind and a highly developed sense of prayer on the

part of those involved. To what extent Crowley had achieved the required standards – if he ever did – is debatable: he always had too much on his erotic, sensual mind to make him sufficiently stable. While he took the Abramelin oath with sincere intent, it was beyond him ever to be able to honour it. His word therefore broken, albeit not intentionally, he lay himself open to redoubtable spiritual reprisals. How much this affected his life depends upon one's view of magic and its potential. Yet from this time onward, Crowley was slowly to lose any concept of right and wrong. With this failing, he also lost any means by which he could handle his own life and affairs in anything like a commonsensical manner. Henceforth, his existence was to sway from one extreme to another, his fortune seeping away with every oscillation.

Crowley was now twenty-five years old. He was self-confident, brash, eccentric, egotistic, highly intelligent, arrogant, witty, wealthy and, when it suited him, cruel. He lived in and out of a dramatic fantasy world which revolved around him. He was also talented as a writer and skilled as a mountaineer, yet these were talents he seemed not to respect.

As his ship sailed across the Atlantic, taking him to the New World for the first time, Crowley must have felt rejuvenated, the future filled with endless hope, adventure and possibility.

6

Rhythms of Rapture

Crowley disembarked in New York on 6 July 1900. The sun reverberated off the buildings and the streets were stifling. The heat was so oppressive that he took one cold bath after another throughout the day: when he ventured out, his perambulations round the city were frequently punctuated by calls at ice-cream vendors or bars where they served iced coffee, iced water or melons. It was his first experience of real heat and gave him cause to wonder if he should carry on south to Mexico after all.

That New York was suffering a heat wave at the time was lost on him because Crowley did not read newspapers. He had, he declared, 'already learnt that even the finest mind is bound to perish if it suffers the infection of journalism. It is not merely that one defiles the mind by inflicting upon it slipshod and inaccurate English, shallow, commonplace vulgar, hasty and prejudiced thought, and deliberate dissipation. Apart from these positive pollutions, there is the negative effect. To read a newspaper is to refrain from reading something worth while.' Newspapers, he wrote in his autobiography, were little more than sheets of deceptive or opinionated reportage or ill-considered judgments.

The heat aside, the city did not impress him. It looked unplanned and lacked the history of a European metropolis. The people were also not to his liking; nor was the Statue of Liberty, which he was under the misapprehension had originally had another purpose. 'The vanity of the natives [he wrote] led them therefore to concentrate their enthusiasm on a rejected

statue of commerce intended for the Suez Canal. This they had purchased at secondhand and grandiloquently labelled "Liberty enlightening the World." They had been prophetic enough to put it on an island with its back to the mainland.'

The statue may not have gripped him, but Crowley did react to America in the way many Europeans did – and still do – by recognising that the concept of liberty underpinned much of society. He enjoyed the easy-going social attitude, the lack of class-consciousness and snobbery, and wondered at the prosperity of New Yorkers. clearly, he did not wander round the Bowery or far off the main thoroughfares.

After a few days' stopover, Crowley boarded a train at Grand Central Station, bound for Mexico City. The journey lasted over a week: it was a marathon trip across the southern and south central states of America, and Crowley had not looked forward to it. He found that the Edinburgh-to-Inverness train taxed his patience. Yet he soon fell in with the spirit of travel and enjoyed himself.

If New York had not been up to expectations, Mexico City was at first a positive disappointment. The service in the Hotel Iturbide in which Crowley took rooms was poor, the food abysmal and good wine conspicuous by its absence. He avoided tequila and preferred not to eat roast *cabrito*, *tacos* and *tortillas*. Crowley was always a fussy eater: for all his adventuring in the realms of mountains and magic, not to mention his penchant for spicy curries, he abjured 'foreign' food. As a child, he refused to eat jam and was well into middle age before he would eat salad: he was not averse to lobster mayonnaise but refused lobster salad because he disapproved of the combination of consonants in its name.

Moving out of the hotel, he rented lodgings in a house overlooking nearby Alameda Park, in the city centre. Employing a young Mexican woman to keep house, Crowley turned to magical matters, including founding his own magical order, the Lamp of the Invisible Light, or L.I.L. The order demanded that a lamp burn continuously in a temple containing various talismans corresponding to the forces of nature. Incantations were aimed

Above left
Edward Crowley

Above right Emily
Bertha Crowley

Right 30, Clarendon
Square, Leamington
Spa

Edward Alexander Crowley, aged about 13

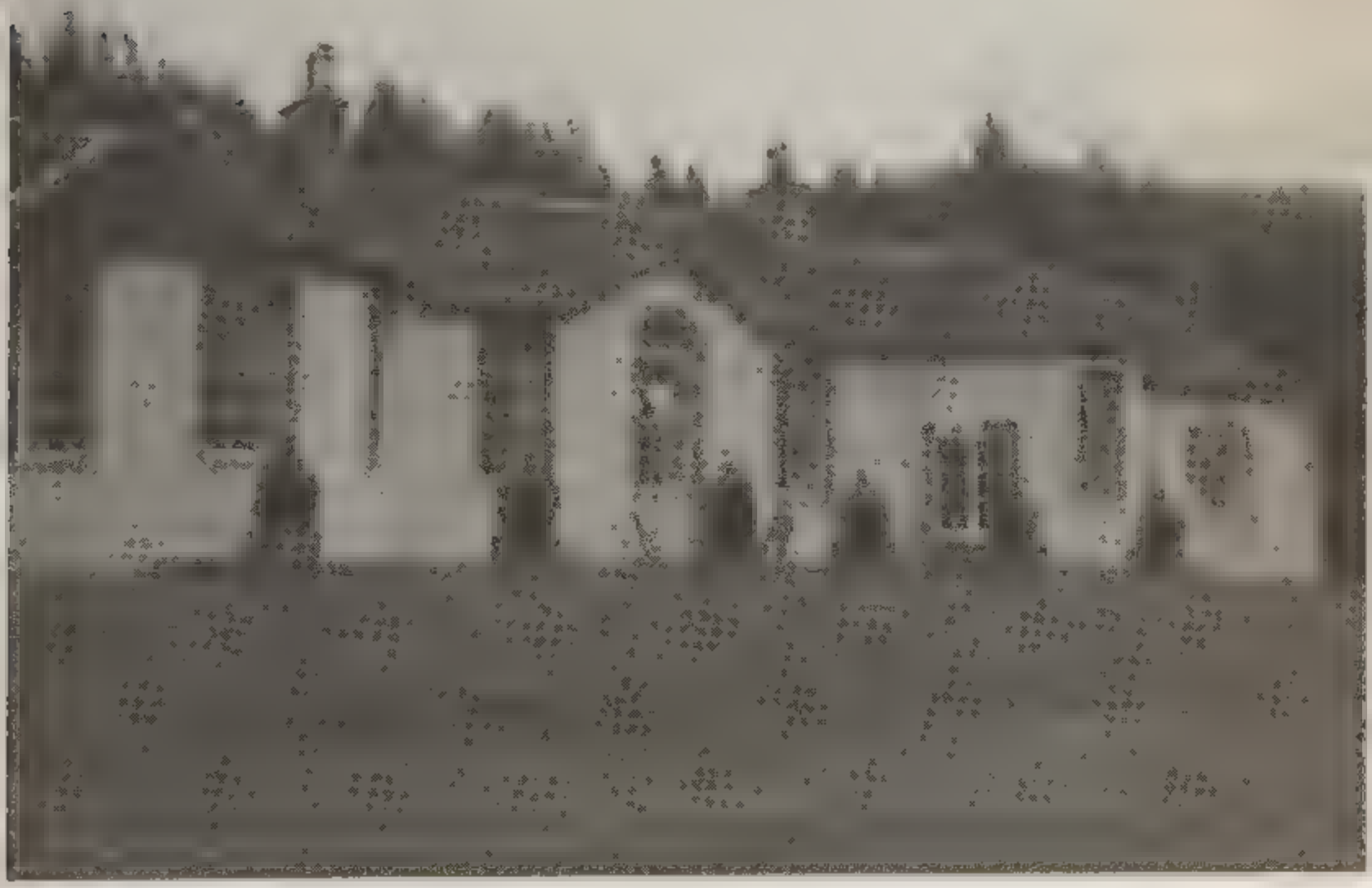
Edward Alei:ster Crowley, in his first term at Trinity College, Cambridge - October, 1895

Allan Bennett

Samuel Liddell Mathers

Boleskine, circa 1905

Boleskine today: Crowley's temple for the Abramelin Operation was in the room behind the right hand lamppost: the french doors were those he had installed The six bushes stand on the terrace made for the magical rite

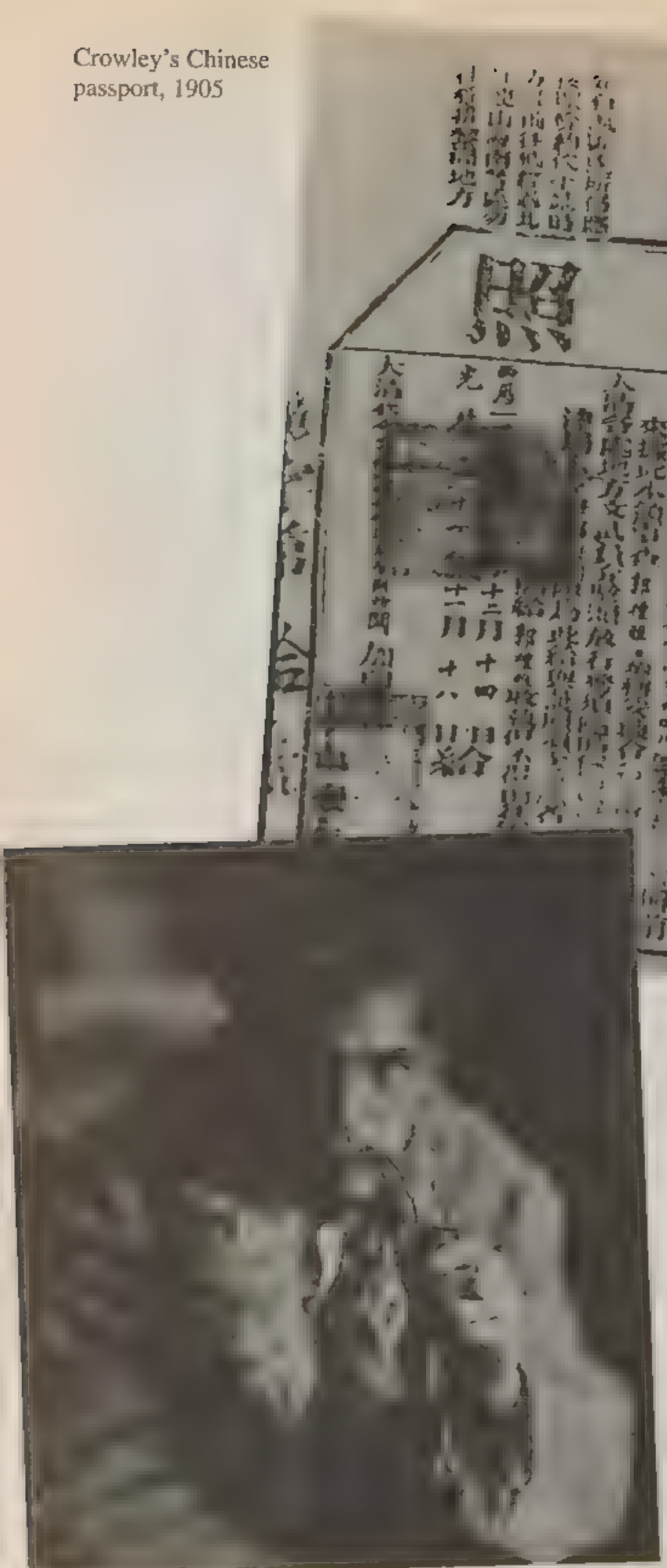


Rose Kelly

Right Exhibit 666: the 26th. dynasty funerary stele dedicated to Ankh-f-n-Khonsu

Below The k² Expedition: Wessely and Pfannl (standing), Eckenstein and Crowley (seated, right), Guillarmod and Knowles (front row)

Crowley's Chinese passport, 1905



Crowley, the explorer-poet, 1906

Right Crowley, Rose and Lola the photo Crowley sent to the divorce judge

Below right Leila Waddell

Below left Victor Neuburg

owley conducting a public performance of the Rites of Eleusis

his favourite pastime: Crowley (left) playing chess

at causing the lamp to become a focus of energy which would reach out to those ready to receive it. He invented a Ritual of Self-Initiation which, by way of a magical dance, enhanced one's magical awareness, and worked upon achieving invisibility as a means of extending the power of his will.

In this, Crowley claimed partial success: his image in a mirror became faint and unsteady. Yet the real aim was not optical invisibility as such, but the ability to pass unnoticed through a crowd. The trick was to engage in a brief moment of mass suggestion. If everyone present could temporarily have their attention transfixed by one object then, while their attention was so captivated, Crowley (or anyone else) could pass by, to all intents and purposes, unseen. Crowley claimed complete success at this. Raising the spirit of Harpocrates, as the god of silence, he walked down a street in Mexico City wearing a scarlet cape and gold crown. No one apparently paid him any attention so, he assumed, they did not see him.

Another magical activity he was engaged upon involved wearing a bejewelled, golden talisman over his heart. When he was wearing it, he thought only of magical matters, to the deliberate and meditational exclusion of all else. On removing the ornament, he forbade himself to think of magic. In doing this, he was in effect strengthening his control over his thought processes.

With whom Crowley associated in Mexico City is not fully recorded. It seems he did not know anyone on his arrival, but had an introduction to an elderly man called Don Jesús Medina, probably provided by Mathers' friends. Medina, who according to Crowley was descended from Alonso Pérez de Guzmán, the Duke of Medina-Sidonia and the admiral in charge of the Spanish Armada, was a senior freemason of a form of masonry known as the Scottish Rite.

Believing Crowley to be a man of upstanding character and considerable magical knowledge, Medina initiated him into this form of freemasonry, running him through the various grades of achievement with lightning speed. Crowley was planning to be in Mexico City only for a short while, so time was of the essence:

and he was impatient. In later years, he claimed he reached the position of Sovereign Grand Inspector General, the highest of thirty-three grades in the Scottish Rite of Freemasonry, but no records exist in masonic archives of him even having been initiated to the first. In exchange, Don Jesús Medina was made a high priest in the LIL.

Not ignoring his literary career, it was in Mexico City that Crowley wrote a verse (and magical) play based upon Wagner's opera, *Tannhauser*. The seed of the idea had been planted in his mind in Paris when, at one of Mathers' public ceremonies, Crowley had met an American opera singer whom he took as a lover, 'the romance of an intrigue with so famous an artist [exciting] my imagination.' Curiously, he claimed they became engaged, despite the fact that she was already married to 'some husband that she had left lying about in Texas.' Back in London, Crowley heard her sing the part of Venus in *Tannhauser* at Covent Garden, his fascination with the singer, the music and the idea gelling in his mind. According to Royal Opera Company records, the only artiste to sing this part in London, between 1899 and 1902, was the American soprano Susan Strong.

Needless to say, once Crowley was out of London, Susan Strong was forgotten and he carried on as usual, having dalliances whenever and wherever he could. In Mexico City, he picked up a whore and went with her to a slum area where he was attracted by 'the insatiable intensity of passion that blazed from her evil inscrutable eyes and tortured her worn face into a whirlpool of seductive sin.' Sex with her boosting his creative powers, he returned to his lodgings and wrote for sixty-seven consecutive hours on the conversation in verse between Venus and Tannhauser. The whore, no doubt, satisfied Crowley's lifelong craving for exotic women.

His exciting sexual experiences apart, Mexico appealed to Crowley, and he came to admire the Mexicans, whom he saw as simple folk yet to be 'poisoned by hypocrisy and the struggle for life.' Theirs was a mellow existence, the pace of life slow: the work ethic of England meant nothing here. Work was merely a

necessary interruption to lazy pleasure. The land and its beauty captivated Crowley: he wrote,

> *the magnificent mountain air the splendour of the sun, the flamboyant beauty of the flowers, the intoxicating intimacy of leaping, fearless love which flamed in every face made my mind a racing rhythm of rapture The maximum of romance and pleasure is to be found in Mexico, even in the quite small provincial towns. There is always some sort of Alameda, a well-wooded square more or less in the middle of the town with seats in any number, and a bandstand where a band plays every night without any swank, because people like music It is never too hot, there is usually a pleasant breeze, enough to stir the leaves and not enough to disturb and annoy It is full of men and women, all seem young and all are charming, spontaneous and ready to make any desired kind of love*

The Mexican attitude towards love and sex appealed to Crowley, too. It was uninhibited, with

> *no false shame, no contamination by ideas of commerce and material matters in general There is no humbug about purity, uplift, idealism, or any such nonsense I cannot hope to express the exquisite pleasure of freedom One's spontaneity was not destroyed by anticipations of all sorts of difficulty in finding a friend of any desired type, obstacles in the way of consummating the impulse, and unpleasantness in the aftermath The problem of sex, which has reduced Anglo-Saxon nations to hysteria and insanity has been solved in Mexico by the co-operation of climate and cordiality Even Catholicism,* [he was keen to note] *has lost most of its malignance in Mexico Clergy and laity unite, spiritually and somatically, with gay ardour . Of course, the priest likes a little gratification for his complaisance, but that is a very human trait, and as he is neither greedy, malicious, nor hypocritical, the charity which he enjoys is given freely in the friendliest spirit.*

In short, Mexico was the antithesis of Europe as Crowley

knew it, and of Britain in particular. The British way was riddled with conscience and guilt, denial and prudery, suppression and, consequently, perversion, whereas the Mexican way was free of 'the pious pretence that evil does not exist [which] only makes it vague, enormous and menacing.' The British, Crowley observed, hid from the truth while Mexicans faced it. They were brave and unashamed of their animal appetites, accepting their humanity for what it was rather than seeking to elevate it above its natural station. The priggishness of the British, Crowley thought, was destroying them, and he was of the opinion that all things should be brought out into the open - especially sex – for 'the repression of natural instincts was an insult to nature and a short cut to moral deformity.'

To Crowley's eye, this freedom from restraint meant that the Mexicans were independent. There was no British class structure, no arrogance of superiority, no (as Crowley put it) sublime devotion to etiquette and, above all, no selfishness or intolerance. He found the admixture of paganism and Christianity attractive and blamed Britain for its 'Anglo Saxon conception of Christianity which pollutes the race' which even other Europeans avoided, not being 'bound together by that insect-like collective consciousness which stamps the Anglo-Saxon.' Individuality of mind and spirit was important to Crowley. It was the stuff of which poets, like him, were made. England, he considered, was 'the most fertile mother of poets, but she kills the weak and drives the strong to happier lands . . . The English poet must either make a successful exile or die of a broken heart.' From his rooms overlooking Alameda Park, Crowley brooded on Britain and what he considered its moral decline, commercialisation and shallowness. He recalled jostling London crowds, 'perspiring brutes belching the fumes of beer', the 'ever-abiding sense of sin and shame.' He even, in true expatriate fashion, criticised the weather.

In order to get the feel of the country and observe the people, Crowley made excursions into the Mexican countryside. Travelling to Iguala, a hundred miles south of Mexico City, he purchased an orange-coloured pony which could apparently do

a back flip somersault; more probably, it was fond of rearing and unseating its rider. Crowley's liberal use of the crop increased the animal's intransigence and he sold it after returning to Mexico City. On another outing, he went to Vera Cruz, Mexico's main seaport 250 miles east of the capital, describing the spectacular journey: 'For the first forty miles one runs through tropical jungle, then the track suddenly begins to mount and wind its way among the sub-alpine gorges, with the whole eighteen thousand feet of Citlaltépetl towering above. The scenery continually changes in character as one ascends, and then suddenly one comes out on the plateau, a level vastness almost desert save from cactus and aloe, with the two cones of Iztaccíhuatl and Popocatépetl sticking out of it.'

Travelling in Mexico could be hard. Lodging places were few and far between and Crowley, despite picking up more than a smattering of the language, was often left to his own devices. On a hillside, he found a dead Mexican labourer, desiccated by the sun and untouched by vultures because, Crowley thought, the body was too impregnated with chillies to suit the scavengers' taste. He slept in the rough, waking on one occasion in a sugar plantation to find he was being watched: a shot from his revolver saw the faces off. In a pioneer camp the following night, he watched a Chinese coolie scald scorpions out of the walls with boiling water: by morning, Crowley's legs were so enflamed by mosquito bites he could not get his riding boots on. Inevitably, he contracted recurrent malaria and fell ill. An American doctor called Parsons, who was running a scam on patients by diagnosing appendicitis for which his colleague operated at M$1,000 per operation, befriended and treated Crowley with quinine.

Crowley, who avoided contact with the British in Mexico ('The [British] consul was habitually constipated and the vice-consul habitually drunk. It is a curious fact that all over the world these qualities never vary'), gravitated towards the Americans, many of whom were professional gamblers: Mexico City in 1900 had much the same ambience as Havana in the days of Batista. Two of them, called Wilson and McKee, tried a sting

on Crowley, who saw through it. They were so impressed by his acuity and innocent young face (he says) that they invited him to help take a high roller in a poker game. He declined. However, Crowley did go to some of the many gambling houses, where he played Spanish Monte, a card game the object of which is to predict cards coming into play: it is vaguely similar to Snap! but played for high stakes. One night, having placed a very high bet in a gaming house, he experienced a cautionary vision such as he had had at the chess congress in Berlin. Although he won the game, Crowley never gambled again save, just to be sociable, once in Monte Carlo.

Most of the expatriates Crowley met in the American Club, where he was introduced to several ranchers who owned properties in the province of Guanajuato to the north-west of Mexico City. Invited to stay with them to get over his bout of malaria, he gratefully accepted.

For all his travelling around, Crowley made no attempt to climb mountains, even though, on a clear day, he could see the snow-capped peaks of Popocatépetl and Iztaccíhautl from his window. Both higher than the Alps, they were nothing like as difficult to ascend, but Crowley bided his time, concentrating upon his magical work. Oscar Eckenstein was on his way to join him.

When Eckenstein reached Mexico City, late in the year, he and Crowley started planning climbing trips but, during the period of preparation, Crowley came face to face with his friend over the matter of magic. One evening, Crowley confided in Eckenstein that he was having magical problems. When he was done, Eckenstein rounded on Crowley and gave him 'the worst quarter of an hour of my life. He summed up my magical situation and told me that my troubles were due to my inability to control my thoughts.'

Eckenstein, dismissive of matters magical, was in part right. Crowley's problem lay not in his inabilities but in his failure to focus his mind. His criticisms voiced, Eckenstein offered to teach Crowley how to concentrate and discipline his attention. Crowley, accepting that this was a weakness, agreed. The lessons

consisted of meditational concentration and measured breathing linked to the intense visualisation of specific images. For half an hour, morning and evening, the exercise was conducted with rigour. Once the visualisation was achieved, Crowley was advanced on to concentrating on moving objects and, finally, to his other senses. He was instructed to imagine the taste of chocolate or quinine, the scent of perfumes, the sound of bells and the touch of silk, sand and fur, retaining these in his mind. The training methods were essentially those of yoga, and Crowley was grateful for them. 'There is no doubt,' he later wrote, 'that these months of steady scientific work, unspoiled by my romantic fancies, laid the basis of a sound magical and mystic technique.'

Yet Eckenstein's main purpose for being in Mexico was to climb, taking Crowley higher than he had ever been. Around Christmas 1900, they went to Amecameca, a town thirty-six miles from Mexico City and the starting point for climbers. Gaining assistance with porters from the local mayor, they ascended Iztaccíhuatl, pitching camp at 14,000 feet, between the present-day car park at La Joya and the outlying peak of Los Pies. They lived there for three weeks, acclimatising themselves to the altitude and climbing both the peak above them and the higher summits of La Cabeza and El Pecho. Crowley claims they set a world record while there, climbing 4,000 feet at 16,000 feet altitude in just under one and a half hours. In his autobiography, Crowley maintained that he and Eckenstein held every mountaineering record bar one in 1901, that being the highest altitude to which a man had climbed.

Life in the camp was basic. They ate locally purchased tinned food, but much of it was old and they consequently suffered from diarrhoea. Stomach trouble aside, however, Crowley enjoyed himself, practising with Eckenstein's crampons. When not climbing, the two men sat in camp, shooting bottles with their firearms, which also served to deter thieves from their tents.

On breaking camp and returning to Amecameca, they visited the mayor to pay their respects, to find him in a despondent

mood. It was some time before they discovered the reason. The poor man was trying to think how to break bad news to them. At last, he came out with it: Queen Victoria was dead. To the mayor's consternation, this news was greeted by Crowley and Eckenstein with considerable joy.

From Crowley's point of view, a matriarchal tyrant had died. He had hated Victoria since childhood, when he had played a game in which he was the King of Patagonia leading his army against the Queen. 'I cannot imagine [he declared] why, at this very early age, I cultivated a profound aversion to, and contempt for, Queen Victoria. Merely, perhaps, the clean and decent instincts of a child!' Now, with her death, a watershed in British history had been reached. 'A sovereign of suet, a parliament of putty, an aristocracy of alabaster, an intelligentsia of india-rubber' and 'a proletariat of pulp' were gone. A new age was promised in which the air of 'smug, sleek, superficial, servile, snobbish, sentimental shopkeeping' would be blown away and what Crowley termed the morass of mediocrity could be dynamited to smithereens.

Travelling to Colima province, 350 miles west of Mexico City, their next expedition was considerably more adventurous. Crowley and Eckenstein prepared to conquer Volcán de Fuego de Colima, one of the world's most active volcanoes. It was erupting as they approached, ash burning holes in their clothing at a range of twelve miles. Climbing first the adjacent, snow-clad, higher (and extinct) volcano Nevado de Colima, they headed for their goal but failed to reach it. Their boots were scorched from the heat of the rocks. Sending their *mozos* (porters) to Zapotitlán with their camping equipment, they headed off to find a ranch to the owner of which they carried an introduction, but got lost at night in virgin forest, only their combined senses of direction saving them. Returned from Colima, they climbed the vast volcano near Toluca, forty miles from Mexico City, sleeping rough in the crater.

Their next climb was Popocatépetl, up which they took a journalist who had doubted their achievements in a local paper. He could not keep their pace so they roped him up,

Eckenstein pulling him while Crowley goaded him on with an ice axe. How they got him over packed ice is not recorded, although their glissading descent terrified the man. An article by way of apology duly appeared.

To round off Eckenstein's trip, they thought to attempt Volcán Citlaltépetl, Mexico's highest mountain near Orizaba, but decided against it. They had climbed enough for the time being and instead made plans to mount a Himalayan expedition to conquer Chogo Ri, the second-highest mountain in the world, today known as K2.

Eckenstein departed for London on 20 April 1901. Crowley set off overland for San Francisco with the intention of going on to Ceylon to visit Allan Bennett. He was sad to leave Mexico, the culture shock hitting him as he crossed the Rio Grande at El Paso. 'Coming straight from the quiet civilisation of Mexico [he wrote] it was a terrible shock to find myself in touch with the coarse and brutal barbarism of Texas.' Texas was hard-drinking, brash and loud; even the whores, he found, were not to his liking. Before heading off across New Mexico, Crowley returned across the river to Ciudad Juárez, to bid goodbye to the girl who had kept house for him and, no doubt, kept his bed warm, in Mexico City. While there, he saw some migrant workers gambling. As he watched, one of the players grabbed another by his long hair and gouged his eyes out with his thumbs. The blinded man screamed but most of the onlookers 'maintained an attitude of philosophical indifference. It was no business of theirs, except so far as it might remind them to visit the barber.'

San Francisco impressed Crowley as little as El Paso had. It was nothing more than 'a madhouse of frenzied money-making and frenzied pleasure seeking, with none of the corners chipped off.' He spent most of his time in Chinatown, gaining a deep respect for and affinity to the Chinese, realising 'instantly their spiritual superiority to the Anglo-Saxon.' He also started writing an ambitiously long lyric poem, 'Orpheus, a lyrical legend', which was not completed for three years.

On 1 May, Crowley noted in his diary, 'I solemnly began

anew the operation of the Great Work.' He was returning to the Abramelin Operation. He planned a schedule of preparation, including the disciplines of thought Eckenstein had taught him, the assuming of 'God forms' in which he visualised himself as a god, astral visions, the dedication of talismans and the invocation of Adonia ha-Aretz, another name for the Holy Guardian Angel. He also concentrated on developing further his Body of Light powers.

Two days later, on 3 May, Crowley boarded the *Nippon Maru* bound for Honolulu, arriving there on 9 May. He disembarked with the romantic notion of renting a grass beach hut at Waikiki, acquiring a native girl with whom he would write poetry and work magic, her sexual favours encouraging both. This was abandoned when, the next day, Crowley met Mrs Alice Mary Rogers, whom he referred to in a letter to Gerald Kelly as Mary Beaton, finding this hugely funny: Mrs Beaton was the author of the most famous Victorian book on housekeeping, a standard for all housewives.

An American woman ten years his senior, married to a lawyer and with a young son in tow, she had come to Hawaii to avoid the hay fever season in the USA. Crowley, infatuated with her, set about wooing her. This took some effort and time but, after several weeks, Alice succumbed and they had strenuous and exciting sex. Although Crowley considered it was foolish falling in love with white women, for they introduced concepts of impurity into love, he could not help himself. It must be said that Crowley frequently fell in love, only to ditch the objects of his affections when he tired of, or had finished using, them. So it was with Alice. Although she accompanied Crowley on the next leg of his journey aboard another Japanese vessel, the *America Maru*, to Yokohama, they parted there, she returning to the United States and her husband. Their brief fling was later celebrated in a sequence of poems, *Alice An Adultery*, published in 1903. Crowley thought that the poems, one for each day of their affair, illustrated 'the intensity of my passion, the profundity of my introspection, and my addiction to obscure allusions'.

The colour imagery in the poems was sharp and indicated the influence of drugs:

She lifts the eyelids amethyst,
And looks from half-shut eyes,
Gleaming with miracles of mist,
Grey shadows on blue skies;
And on her whole face sunrise kissed,
Child-wonderment most wise

The whitest arms in all the earth
Blush from the lilac bed.
Like a young star even at its birth
Shines out the golden head.
Sad violets are the maiden girth,
Pale flames night-canopied.

He went on to admit that the reader had to really think to understand the allusions. The reviews were mixed.

Yet Alice served a purpose. She proved to Crowley that there was no passion he could not master. Even a deep and passionate love could not swerve him from his chosen, magical path.

Crowley's diary for 29 June notes 'Alice sailed at noon.' The entry for 1 July recorded, 'Had a Jap girl, thus making the 34th nation.' Crowley was keeping a tally of the different nationalities he had tupped.

Since meeting Alice, Crowley seemed to have achieved only one magical technique, and that both dubious and slight. He invented a way to stop mosquitoes biting. In brief, one loved them, accepting their right to live and feed off one. One suppressed the desire to swat them. In a short while, the bites ceased to itch and the mosquitoes left one alone. Clearly, the method was not as effective as Crowley stated: he continued to be bitten by insects and intermittently suffered from malaria for many years.

Japan, like his previous destinations, did not impress

Crowley. The Japanese were, he surmised, racially arrogant and as insular as the English. He gave passing thought to staying at a Zen Buddhist monastery near Kamakura, where he admired the huge statue of the Lord Buddha, but was soon to move on to Shanghai.

On this short voyage were 'two American spinsters of the faded variety, with parchment skin due to dryness of climate and devotion to virtue and cocktails', who informed him that the famous novelist, Thomas Hardy, was aboard their ship. They were wrong. Much to Crowley's amusement, the man turned out to be the Rev. Edward John Hardy, a military chaplain stationed in Hong Kong and author of a book entitled *How to be Happy though Married.*

Curiously, for it was the most cosmopolitan, fascinating Far Eastern city and notorious as a sin bin, Crowley largely ignored Shanghai because he wanted to press on for Hong Kong, where Elaine Simpson, now married to a man called Witkowski, had become a true colonial lady whose life revolved around tiffin, cocktails and bridge evenings. She had given up magic for the time being and had even worn her Golden Dawn robes to a fancy dress party: they won first prize. Sister Fidelis and his magical ally was lost to him, although, for over six months, he dreamed of her. From now on, although others would come and go in his life, Crowley realised he was on his own, having to travel the magical path without human assistance.

Somewhat disheartened, he sailed for Ceylon via Singapore and Penang, meeting on the voyage an English trader called Harry Lambe, who lived in Calcutta. Arriving in Colombo on 6 August, he detested the town:

> *Its climate is chronic, its architecture is an unhappy accident; its natives are nasty, the men with long hair cooped up by a comb smelling of fish, the women with waists bulging black between coat and skirt, greasy with coconut oil, and both chewing betel and spitting it out till their teeth ooze with red and the streets look like shambles, its English are exhausted and enervated The Eurasians are anaemic abortions, the burghers Dutch half-casts stolid squareheads, the*

Portuguese piebalds sly sneaks, vicious, venal, vermiform villains The Tamils are black but not comely. The riff-raff of rascality endemic in all ports is here exceptionally repulsive The high-water mark of social tone, moral elevation, manners and refinement is attained by the Japanese ladies of pleasure.

His opinion of the local religions was just as bad.

Allan Bennett, although aspiring to be a Buddhist mendicant, was disillusioned with some aspects of Buddhism and had become the pupil of a high-caste Hindu Shaivite guru, Shri Parananda: under his secular name, the Hon. P. Ramanathan, he was Solicitor-General of Ceylon and Bennett was his sons' tutor. As a teenager, Bennett had succeeded in attaining Shivadarshana, a trance-like state he spent years trying to recreate: now, living with the guru at his home in Cinnamon Gardens, he learned how to achieve it once more.

Crowley was pleased to see Bennett, yet he had an ulterior motive to their meeting. He wanted to discuss Mathers, in particular a religious argument Bennett had had with him, in which Mathers had pulled a revolver and threatened to kill Bennett, only being prevented from doing so by Moina. The outcome of his discussion with Bennett left Crowley with an increasingly low opinion of Mathers.

The tropical climate had eradicated Bennett's asthma but left him tired. Crowley suggested they both go to Kandy, one of Ceylon's hill stations, to escape the humidity of the coast and practise yoga. As Crowley was bankrolling the trip, Bennett eagerly agreed, and they set off on 17 August, renting a bungalow called Marlborough overlooking the lake and the temple, the repository for one of Buddhism's holy relics, one of Buddha's teeth. In effect, they were going on a magical, spiritual retirement.

Crowley's mind was in turmoil. He had 'lost' Alice Rogers, Elaine Simpson's magical companionship and admiration for Mathers. Only Eckenstein and Bennett were reliable anchors in his life, and he was glad to have the latter on hand to help him, through teaching him the principles of yoga, in the 'search

for a spiritual solution to the material muddle'. Yet Bennett did more. He introduced Crowley to the Hindu and Buddhist faiths, to their humanist philosophies and doctrines. Crowley took an abiding interest in everything Bennett put before him. It was as if he was at a spiritual feast, more than likely enhanced by hashish and, on 28 and 29 September, possibly by some experimentation with laudanum and the cocaine Crowley was taking, having broken a tooth. He was also to receive an indication of how far Bennett had progressed in his oriental religious studies. One afternoon, Crowley returned to their bungalow to find that Bennett had levitated several feet off the ground, drifting to and fro in the breeze blowing from the door.

By chance, they happened to be in Kandy for the annual festival of Perahera when Buddha's tooth, which Crowley sceptically deduced was not of human origin, is put on display. He was much taken by the event, 'a gigantic jollification; they bring out all their elephants, dancers, monks, officials, drums, horns, torches – anything that makes a blaze or a noise, and let them all loose at once. The effect is of impromptu excitement. Poor, serious, single minded Allan, with his whole soul set on alleviating the sufferings of humanity and helping them to reach a higher plane of existence, was saddened and disillusioned.' Yet the festival tension affected him: 'it put one's nerves on the rack. It was almost a torture to feel so intensely, and desire so deliriously, such unintelligible irritations. Hours passed in this intoxicating excitement. One can understand perfectly the popular enthusiasm. It was the release of the subconscious desires of the original animal.'

Although he spent some of his time at Kandy rewriting *Tannhauser*, Crowley was most involved in studying yoga. He discovered that a trance gave considerable spiritual power and could be an important adjunct to his magical work for, as it removed inhibition, it strengthened the will. He worked hard at his studies, persisting at the physical exercises, applying Eckenstein's lessons in concentration and utilising his mountain-shaped muscles to overcome muscular pain. He mastered the Asana position in which he lost all awareness of

his body, drifting into a relaxing state of relief. He was able to maintain this skill well into middle age, relying upon it in times of stress.

The strict exercise regime did much for Crowley's health. His muscles tightened, his complexion cleared and his intermittent acne, from which he often suffered, disappeared. He learned new breathing exercises and believed he found a second method to foil mosquitoes: one held one's breath so the muscles grew rigid, preventing the insect from puncturing the skin. Bennett, who daily allowed leeches in a nearby pond to feed on him, could force them to let go merely by holding his breath and tensing his muscles.

By the middle of September, Crowley was growing restless with yoga's ascetic regimen. Leaving Bennett, he returned to Colombo for some rest and recreation, primarily involving Singhalese whores and the Japanese ladies of pleasure, yet he simultaneously carried on with the yoga, and, on 2 October, back in Kandy, reached the advanced state of Dhyana. At this point, he decided to stop. Partly, he was exhausted and felt he had gone as far as he could, but he had, as he freely admitted, also grown impatient with the whole business. It was several years before he revisited the discipline.

With Crowley again providing the means, he and Bennett decided to tour Ceylon's sacred Buddhist sites. Bennett was now all the more seriously considering his mendicancy. They travelled to the cave at Dambulla, the famous pinnacle hill of Sigiria and Anuradhapura. *En route*, Crowley tried his hand at big-game shooting, much to Bennett's shock: as a Buddhist adherent, the taking of all life was anathema to him. A charging buffalo narrowly missed exacting its revenge on Crowley.

The religious sites did not appeal to Crowley. He claimed they indicated a greatness in Ceylon's history but lacked the spirituality of ancient Egypt, which Crowley had never visited, and were ruined by the degeneracy of modern society: the exquisite rock carvings in Dambulla were covered in paint which, Crowley said, hid their artistry. That they had always been painted was lost on him.

It was not long before Crowley had had enough of religious culture and got itchy feet. He had thought to remain longer in Ceylon, not going on to meet Eckenstein in India as they had planned by correspondence, but Bennett advised him to go. He was advancing his plans towards becoming a mendicant, but not in Ceylon. A college for girls had recently started in Rangoon, the headmistress offering Bennett employment as a physical science master. He had accepted as the job funded his move to Burma, where Buddhism, he considered, was uncorrupted.

Accepting Bennett's advice, Crowley put aside his magical studies, packed up his copious travelling library of vellum-bound books and manuscripts, purchased a ticket for Trivandrum and, in readiness for the Himalayas, grew a beard which caused him to be mistaken as a Boer: there were a number of PoW camps in Ceylon for enemy troops captured in the Boer War. He and Bennett parted company and Crowley sailed for India.

For several weeks, Crowley wandered about southern India, by chance meeting on his way Colonel H.S. Olcott, one of the founders of the Theosophical Society, who approached him in a railway station, asking if he could be of any service. Arriving in Madura (now Madurai), Crowley planned on visiting the Hindu Meenakshi temple complex. He felt more sympathy for Hinduism than Buddhism, believing it to be a more vibrant religion. Of the opinion that, as a European, he would be forbidden access to the inner regions of the complex, Crowley decided to become an adventurer in the mould of his hero, Sir Richard Burton, who had entered the forbidden city of Mecca disguised as a Muslim. Purchasing a loincloth and a bowl, he set himself up as a beggar. The locals, he says, regarded him with suspicion until they realised he was a yoga expert, whereupon one, who spoke English, befriended him and gave him a guided tour of the temples, where Crowley apparently sacrificed a goat to the deity Bhavani. Another thing that fascinated Crowley was the Shivalingam, portrayed as the god Shiva with a large, erectile phallus, worshipped as a symbol of the power of divine creativity.

All through his travels, Crowley kept up his literary

production. In Madura, on 16 and 17 November, he wrote 'Ascension Day' and 'Pentecost' in parody of Robert Browning's 'Christmas Eve' and 'Easter Day'. Seldom a day went by when he was not at work on his verse, building what was an ever increasingly prodigious body of poetry.

Eager to move on, the peripatetic Crowley went to Madras ('sleepy, sticky and provincial'), then boarded a French-owned coastal trader, the *Duplex*, bound for Calcutta. The journey was not pleasant. To reach the ship Crowley had to go out in a bucking rowing boat through a storm that followed him all the way. The ship reeked of fuel and cooking oil, but Crowley bore it: it was an adventure and that was what he wanted.

Once in Calcutta, he met up with Harry Lambe, who invited him to stay. Crowley, suffering again from malaria, was glad to accept. Lambe lived in a merchant company compound with three other Englishmen, one of whom was Edward Thornton, the grandson and namesake of a well known Indian government magistrate who had put down two native uprisings single handed, and they became friends. Lambe's servants held Crowley in a different light. They discovered (by, according to Crowley, magical means) that he had been to the Meenakshi temples and was a magician. One of the servants asked Crowley to magically help murder a troublesome aunt and assist a brother pass his examinations by putting a spell on the examiners.

Crowley had more important things to do. He took lessons in Hindustani so he and Eckenstein would be able to converse with locals, attempted unsuccessfully to learn Balti, walked about the compound, meditated, was taken to the races, read several texts on Buddhism and criticised the British for bringing their own women out from Britain. India, he declared, was no fit place for Englishwomen for they were unsuited to the climate, the heat making them lascivious and uncontrollable.

Although still running a fever, Crowley gave in once more to his wanderlust and, on 21 January 1902, set sail for Rangoon, accompanied by Thornton. The city surprised him, the Irrawaddy river faster than expected and the gilded pinnacles of the Shwedagon pagoda breathtaking, although the

surroundings shocked him both for their squalor and their hypocrisy: the pagoda 'is the rendezvous of the ragged, the diseased and the deformed, charity to whom is supposed to confer "merit". Merit means insurance against reincarnation in undesirable conditions.'

Employing a Christian Indian called Peter and dosing himself with quinine and iced champagne, which was thought to have medicinal qualities, Crowley existed for several days 'on a low level, without desire even to die. I began to understand the psychology of Allan Bennett. My mind was abnormally clear: I was cleansed of the contamination of desire. Nothing was worth wishing for; I did not even complain of suffering. This state of mind is a useful experience. Something very similar can be induced artificially by fasting.'

As is common with malaria, the disease suddenly abated and, although weak, Crowley pressed on with his primary aim in coming to Burma. He wanted to visit Allan Bennett, who by now was living in the monastery of Lamma Sayadaw Kyoung, south-east of Akyab (now called Sittwe). To reach the monastery meant journeying up the Irrawaddy then going overland on a dangerous crossing of the Arakan hills. Obtaining the correct papers and a letter of introduction to a forestry commissioner who might lend them elephants, Crowley and Thornton left Rangoon on 25 January, accompanied by Peter. They sailed upriver to Prome (known today as Pye), then switched to a steam ferry, the *Amherst*, bound for Thayetmyo. There, they hired bullock carts and got as far as Kyaukkyi. Meeting the forestry commissioner, a man called Garr, and his assistant, they stayed the night then went to Mindon, where they were held up for two days while the local headman tried to engage porters for the journey over the hills. None was forthcoming, for the hills were considered too dangerous, so Crowley abandoned the attempt. After unsuccessfully trying to hunt wild buffalo, Crowley and Thornton hired a river going dug-out canoe called a *parang* and headed back the way they had come, stopping from time to time on the riverbank and sleeping at night either in a *dak* bungalow or in the open. At

Kama, they caught the ferry for Prome and Rangoon. It was a romantic interlude. Crowley was taken by the landscape and spent much of his time in the *parang* shooting passing birds, although his fever had returned. He also wrote a poem eulogising his jungle journey.

Back in Rangoon, Crowley paid off Peter (who had been stealing provisions) and parted company with Thornton, who set off on his own for Mandalay. On 12 February Crowley, again laid low with malaria, took passage on a coastal steamer, the *Komilla*, sailing for Akyab. Arriving the next day, he made straight for the monastery of Lamma Sayadaw Kyoung to be confronted by Allan Bennett, now a shaven-headed, saffron-robed Buddhist monk called Bhikkhu Ananda Metteya. As a European, Bennett was revered to such an extent that he and Crowley could not carry on a conversation without interruption by people prostrating themselves and giving Bennett food or gifts, although they did have the chance to discuss the feasibility of introducing Buddhism to Europe

For the first night, Crowley slept in the monastery, but for the rest of his week in Akyab he lodged with Dr Moung Tha Nu, the town's Burmese medical officer. When not visiting Bennett, Crowley wrote poetry, including 'Ahab' which, when it was published later in the year, was criticised not only for its content but also its unreadable typeface. This apart, his current verse was lyrical and often very good. Some of it was philosophical, showing obvious Hindu and Buddhist influences, but most of it was more mainstream, such as 'Hong Kong Harbour', 'On Waikiki Beach' and 'Night in the Valley', written beneath Citlaltépetl, and based upon his travels.

Bidding farewell to Bennett on 22 February, Crowley sailed the next day aboard the SS *Kapurthala* for Chittagong and Calcutta, from where, after collecting his mail and staying a week with a friend of Thornton's, he set off by boat up the Ganges. The call had come from Eckenstein. The Himalayan expedition was ready to go and Crowley was summoned to Rawalpindi.

Heading first for the holy city of Benares ('temples, yogis and dancing girls') then Agra, where he toured the Taj Mahal

('a dream of beauty, with appalling evil things dwelling therein'), Crowley finally reached Delhi on 16 March, where he enjoyed himself in a 'Turkish bath, where the process of purification is completed by charming ladies.' Four days later, he wrote an essay entitled *Science and Buddhism*, a comment upon what Bennett had taught him and what he had read of T.H. Huxley, which he believed represented 'the criticism of my genius upon the varied ideas which I had gathered since I first came to Asia.' With the poetry, it was collected in *The Sword of Song*.

After a brief interlude hunting muggers on the bank of the Ganges, Crowley departed by train for Rawalpindi on 23 March, meeting his fellow expedition members at Delhi railway station. The assault on K2 had started.

The men Crowley met on the train, Eckenstein excepted, were a mixed bunch. Two were Austrians, one a judge, Heinrich Pfannl, the other a barrister and Pfannl's frequent climbing partner, Victor Wessely: both were in their early thirties. Next came an amiable thirty-three-year-old Swiss, Dr J. Jacot Guillarmod, who had been a military doctor and was experienced in alpine climbing. The youngest was an Englishman called Guy John Senton Knowles, a likeable twenty two-year old engineering graduate from Trinity College, Cambridge, who was not an experienced mountaineer but was, like Crowley, eager for adventure and willing to submit himself to the discipline of an expedition. He was also, like the others, able to pay his way, although Crowley had put up the initial £500 to get the ball rolling. Crowley, by dint of having provided the seed capital, was second-in-command under Eckenstein's leadership.

All the expedition members were obliged to abide by a contract which stipulated Eckenstein's unequivocal command, demanded respect of native culture and, curiously, forbade consorting with women: how this affected Crowley is not known, but the idea behind the rule was to keep everyone's mind focused on the task of conquering K2.

Before the train reached Lahore, Crowley had sized up his companions. Wessely was myopic and a messy eater. Pfannl had

spent so much effort in training he was over his peak of fitness before the climb. Guillarmod was easy going but professional, with a good sense of humour. Knowles was 'docile, cheerful and phlegmatic.' Crowley, foreseeing trouble ahead, started to write in his diary about his comrades in code.

The Crowley/Eckenstein expedition was not the first to visit K2. A surveyor, T.G. Montgomery, was the first European to see it, in 1856: he named it K2, as being the second peak in the Karakoram mountain range. In 1887, Sir Francis Younghusband was the next European to see and approach close to it. Another five years passed before Sir William Martin (later Lord) Conway entered the range and renamed it after the explorer, geologist and Himalayan surveyor Henry Haversham Godwin-Austen. This was the expedition of which Eckenstein had been a member.

The mountain was considered unassailable. Rising from a plateau at an altitude of around 12,000 feet, it soared to a summit at 28,250 feet. Some mountaineers had climbed in the vicinity but no one had made a concerted attempt upon it. To this day, it is considered a far more difficult climb than Mount Everest. It is also extremely dangerous. Weather conditions are notoriously fickle and the window of climbing opportunity is small, being restricted to several weeks in early spring or late autumn.

From Rawalpindi, the five mountaineers travelled to Tret, where their three tons of supplies were split into manageable units and loaded on to horse drawn carts for transportation to Srinagar. However, before they could leave an unexpected event occurred. Eckenstein was refused permission to enter Kashmir. The order had apparently come from the Viceroy, Lord Curzon, personally. It was yet another of those unexplained episodes in Eckenstein's secretive private life. Perplexed and annoyed, Eckenstein told the others to press on and he would try to sort the mess out. It was three weeks before he rejoined the party. The reason for his being held back remained unknown, but it was thought Eckenstein was suspected of spying for the Prussians, who were eager to exert influence in the region.

The journey to Srinagar, the capital of Kashmir, was uneventful save for an incident with a cart driver who was deliberately holding progress up in the hope of increasing his wages. Crowley, as temporary leader, exercised a characteristic Englishman-in-conflict-with-the natives approach. 'The first business of any traveller in any part of the world [he considered] is to establish his moral superiority. He has to be uniformly calm, cheerful, just, perspicacious, indulgent and inexorable. He must decline to be swindled out of the fraction of a farthing. If he once gives way, he is done for.' As a consequence, he publicly thrashed the driver.

They arrived in Srinagar on 14 April. Crowley was not well. He was running a slight fever and suffering from *pityriasis versicolor*, a kind of dhobi itch which he had to paint daily with iodine solution. It was decided that they would wait in the town for Eckenstein and, although Crowley was concerned that the delay might cause them to miss the weather window for climbing, he relaxed and, suppressing his fever, went big-game shooting.

Eckenstein was reunited with them on 22 April and, all the supplies repacked into baskets called *kiltas* which could be carried as backpacks by porters, the party began the trek into the mountains on 28 April. The whole expedition was now a sizeable affair, consisting of the 6 mountaineers, 150 porters, who were paid 4 pice *per diem*, 20 personal servants under the command of Crowley's head man, Salama Tantra, a handful of Pathans and 50 pack ponies.

The scenery was breathtaking and the going hard. The Himalayan foothills are steep, the rivers fast-flowing and crossable only by rope and-plank bridges. Every time the party halted, word spread that there was a doctor in it, attracting hundreds who came to be treated, even operated upon, by Guillarmod.

Using Conway's map, with which Crowley found it hard to 'reconcile nature', believing much of it fabricated and suggestive of Conway having exaggerated his achievements, they reached the mountain pass dividing Kashmir and Baltistan, on 4 May.

Once they were over the pass, the problems began. The land was bleak, the wind vicious and the sun brilliant. Crowley found himself frozen in shadow and sunburned in light. They marched for long hours, covering little distance. Ostensibly, they were following the main route to Skardu, yet it was little more than a mountain track. From time to time, local headmen entertained them on night stops, but it was otherwise a monotonous journey, albeit in spectacular surroundings. Crowley, who did not enjoy riding, found his stumbling mount slow and in poor condition. His dhobi itch perpetually irritated his groin and made the flesh sore.

Ten days from the pass, they rode into Skardu, crossing the Indus river by ferry and making for Shigar, where a Christian missionary, whom Crowley noted, no doubt with satisfied irony, had lived for seven years without claiming a single convert, invited them to dinner. From Shigar, they wended their way to Askole, where Eckenstein had quit the Conway expedition, stopping *en route* at hot springs where, for the first time in weeks, they were able to bathe.

Once in Askole, Crowley hired every available man in the town and bought all the food the locals could spare. The expedition now increased in size to a veritable army of 230 men, 18 sheep, 15 goats and several dozen hens, they began the last leg of their journey, to K2. As they prepared their supplies at Askole, Eckenstein and Crowley had a falling out over the latter's insistence on taking his travelling library up the mountain. Crowley argued that intellectual nourishment was as vital as actual food, and he would rather die of physical hunger than starve his brain. It was a stupid and amateurish stance to take, for they needed all the food they could carry and to behave, as Eckenstein considered it, so selfishly was to jeopardise the venture. Nevertheless, Crowley stood firm, insisting that mental health was as important as physical, and, to a point, he was to be proven right.

To some extent, Crowley was ill-suited for such an expedition. He was too egocentric, too individualistic to make a team member. He was a very good climber and, working with

a partner, was an excellent and reliable companion, but, once others came into the game, he reacted against them. Crowley simply was not a man to sacrifice anything for the common good. If anything was to be achieved, he was going to be the achiever, at all costs.

Beyond Askole, they were in uninhabited territory and, establishing food dumps along the way, made steady progress, reaching the Baltoro Glacier on 9 June. Thirty miles long and two wide, it was one of the primary sources of the Indus river. The base of the glacier was 500 feet high, taller by far than any of the expedition had seen before. The face, filled with rocks and debris, was very unstable and cut through with deep torrents of freezing water up to 100 feet across. Getting wet was dangerous, for the water could remove the skin's natural oils, causing it to dry out and flake, leaving suppurating sores: Crowley did not wash at all from 25 May, their last day in Askole, until 19 August, his clothing harbouring lice in every fold and seam. Even removing one's clothing, other than to defecate, was risky in the subzero temperatures.

By modern standards, Crowley's clothing was inappropriate. Like most early mountaineers, the others wore tweeds and flannels, but Crowley, having been travelling round the world, wore many clothes he had bought in India. The material was shoddy and some items were made of cotton: the modern survival dictum, 'Cotton kills', because it does not retain warmth, was unknown then. Luckily, Knowles gave Crowley a shirt of Welsh flannel which lasted the entire expedition, with only the elbows wearing out. His ensemble was finished off with climbing boots, a set of Eckenstein's crampons and a puggree.

To climb the glacier and establish campsites and food dumps, the party divided into three. Crowley and some twenty porters went first. He was in his element, a lone explorer accompanied by his trusty followers. Like many before and since, he was captivated by the grandeur of the Karakorams. It was not long before 'the solitude was producing its beneficent result. The utterly disproportionate minuteness of man purges

him of his smug belief in himself as the final cause of nature. The effect is to produce not humiliation but humility, and this feeling is only the threshold of a selflessness which restores the balance by identifying one with the universe of which one's physical basis is so imperceptibly insignificant a fraction.' Pfannl and Wessely followed the next day with eighty porters, while Eckenstein, Knowles and Guillarmod followed them with the remainder.

The devious driver and the Pathans apart, Crowley admired the porters whom he employed and with whom he climbed. They were, he considered, 'all innocence, all honesty, all good faith, all loyalty, all human kindness. They were absolutely courageous and cheerful, even in the face of what they supposed to be certain death of a most uncomfortable kind.' They wore goat's hair clothing, their feet bound in rags tied by thongs of goat hide which made climbing on ice very difficult. To protect against snow blindness, they grew their hair long, plaiting it into an Afro-style fringe which hung down over their faces.

Three-quarters of the way up the Baltoro, at a point called the Concordia glacial field, a smaller glacier named the Godwin-Austen rose towards K2. Crowley reached this spot on 16 June, to behold their destination towering above him. It was magnificent and spellbinding but Crowley, putting all sense of romance aside, set to studying the mountain for the best ascent route.

Being responsible for determining campsites, Crowley pressed on to establish Camp VIII at 16,592 feet, directly below the summit soaring almost vertically above him. From here, it was clear that the best route was up the east-south-east side of the mountain. For the next two days, Crowley climbed on, establishing Camp IX beneath overhanging ice walls hundreds of feet high and Camp X at 18,733 feet, in an exposed position to avoid the risk of avalanche. Here, he and the porters waited for the rest to catch up. No sooner had Pfannl, Wessely, Knowles and the doctor arrived than a blizzard closed in, not clearing until 27 June, when Eckenstein turned up carrying supplies of fresh bread and meat.

A meeting was held and it was decided, with Eckenstein and Knowles feeling unwell, that Crowley, Pfannl and Guillarmod would make the first attempt on the summit. However, the weather closed in again, with continuous snow falling from 2 July until the 6th.

Pfannl and Wessely reconnoitred the north-east ridge leading to the summit and declared it climbable. Crowley disagreed, but the general consensus was against him so they moved up the ridge to establish Camp XI. Here, although suffering from snow blindness which he described as like having red-hot sand behind his eyeballs, Crowley made several investigative climbs towards the summit, reaching about 22,000 feet. Eckenstein was later to lay claim to Wessely and Guillarmod making the same altitude on 10 July, but the official records state they reached only 21,653 feet. Whatever the truth, it was an altitude record that stood for seven years and was not bettered on K2 until 1939: and it was not until 1954, over six years after Crowley's death, that the summit was fully conquered.

Crowley's snow blindness was not his only problem. By 12 July, he was suffering from indigestion and constipation (common ailments at high altitudes), having difficulty breathing and running a temperature of 103°F. It was malaria. In his feverish sleep, he hallucinated from the effects of fever and oxygen starvation. Crowley maintained in later years that he held the record for having malaria at the highest altitude: it probably still stands. When not climbing, Crowley whiled away his time writing poetry (claiming another altitude record for beating Shelley, who wrote verse on an alpine glacier) and making up rhymes for difficult words. He also read from his now depleted but still evident library.

Camp life was hard. The ground sheets and cork mattresses were barely comfortable. The tents were adequate but the climbers were virtual prisoners in them for days on end, keeping warm with a charcoal-burning Kashmiri *kangri*: the charcoal had to be kept in the tents to keep it dry. It was difficult to prepare warm food, which they badly needed. At that altitude, boiling water took two hours and a mutton stew

ten. Everyone suffered from the bitter cold, although no one was badly frostbitten, and they all lost weight, even Crowley, whose technique of preparation precluded acclimatisation and consisted of building up large reserves of body fat before starting an ascent, burning it off by exertion.

From mid-July, illness started to dog the others. Knowles and Guillarmod kept exhibiting the symptoms of influenza. Pfannl started to suffer from claustrophobia, Eckenstein and Knowles became unduly worried about an outbreak of cholera in Kashmir, and Wessely became obsessed with food, even stealing from the supplies. Only Crowley and Guillarmod seem to have kept their wits and sense of humour intact. When Pfannl and Wessely started to question Eckenstein's leadership, it was suggested they might like to try an ascent to a higher altitude. They concurred and went up to establish Camp XII at approximately 21,000 feet, but soon after arriving there sent a porter back with a note saying that Pfannl was ill. Guillarmod went to his assistance to find him ranting and suffering from oedema of both lungs. They sedated him with morphine and plans were put into place to get the Austrian down the mountain. Then the weather cleared and, for two days, the summit could have been reached, but time was spent recovering Pfannl instead.

To say that Crowley was annoyed is to understate the obvious. He voiced the opinion to Eckenstein that had he restricted the party to just himself, Crowley and Knowles, they would have had a better chance of scaling K2. Yet this is an unfair criticism, for three men would not have been sufficient in the event of a climbing accident or serious illness. Eckenstein's only fault was his choice of personnel.

While Guillarmod took Pfannl down the Baltoro Glacier, the weather deteriorated, the remaining climbers forced to stay in Camp XI from 21 July to 4 August. On 23 July, Guillarmod returned, looming out of the twilight on all fours. He was alone. A porter who had been with him had slid into a crevasse and the doctor, cutting the man's rope free, had proceeded on his own, leaving the porter to

his fate. Both Eckenstein and Crowley were appalled at his callously abandoning the man, even if there had been no other apparent alternative, and immediately descended the mountain to rescue him.

As 1 August dawned, the blizzard intensified. Crowley's malarial fever recurred with the addition of diarrhoea and vomiting: his blood sugar levels were dangerously low. Eckenstein was also ill, probably from fatigue. Finally, three days later, the storm abated and they retreated to Camp IX. On 12 August, Wessely was, for no apparent reason, told to leave the party and Pfannl, out of loyalty to his friend, went with him.

Two days later, the remaining expedition members and their porters had descended to Camp I. The attempt on K2 was over.

Crowley had spent a total of sixty-eight days on K2, two days longer than the others, and set the record for the longest time spent at such an altitude. Of these, only eight days were clear weather. They failed to climb the summit but they were the first team to attempt it and broke all the altitude endurance records.

At the foot of the Baltoro Glacier, they split up. Eckenstein and Knowles, alarmed by the cholera outbreak, took a different route while Crowley and Guillarmod retraced their original steps. Once they reached human habitation, where they could buy fresh fruit and meat, Crowley's health improved and his spirits picked up. Rejoining Eckenstein and Knowles, he travelled by raft from Askole to Skardu, then set off overland for Srinagar, meeting Ernest Radcliffe, the Kashmiri assistant forest commissioner, in his camp at Gunial (now Gultari). He wined and dined them and provided hot baths.

On 6 September, after 132 days away, the party arrived back in Srinagar and the expedition disbanded. Crowley remained behind to go hunting with Radcliffe. On 30 September, he arrived by train in Bombay, shaved off his beard and booked a berth on the SS *Egypt*. Travelling via Aden, and after spending a day in quarantine because he had come from India, Crowley

entered Egypt and went to Cairo, where he booked into Shepheard's Hotel.

His life and character were returning to normal. He avoided the pyramids because he was loath to have 'forty centuries look down on me.' Employing a secretary, he dictated his expedition notes and, in his own words, enjoyed 'wallowing in the fleshpots.' On 5 November 1902, he left Cairo bound for Paris, where Gerald Kelly, who was now living in a studio in rue Campagne-Première, off the Boulevard Montparnasse, had invited him to stay.

7

Enter the Rose of the World

Once in Paris, picking up the threads of his former life, Crowley visited Mathers whom, despite the misgivings voiced with Bennett, he was keen to see again. Crowley still respected Mathers' magical authority, although he now considered himself his equal, and wanted to tell him of all he had learned on his travels: he also wanted to collect some books and cases he had left in Mathers' care.

The meeting, at the Mathers' lodgings on rue Saint Vincent in Montmartre, was strained. Mathers was uninterested in both Crowley's study of oriental religion and his exploits on K2, and heard him out in silence. Crowley, unusually, did not detail their conversation. As for the possessions, Mathers produced the books but said the baggage, including an expensive dressing-case, were not available as he was moving house and they had been packed up. Crowley never received the cases which Mathers, strapped for cash, had almost certainly sold or pawned.

Crowley's concerns about Mathers centred on his believing him to be a black magician who did not invoke his Holy Guardian Angel but malevolent forces and demons. Yet this was only part of the inevitable rift. Mathers' ego required only magical minions and Crowley considered himself beyond a supporting role. He had also started to consider himself as the long-term rightful leader of the Golden Dawn or, if not that, an order of his own creation. For this insubordination, Crowley was to suffer. Mathers engaged a middle-aged woman, recorded by Crowley simply as Mrs M, to magically attack him.

She invited Crowley to tea during which, gradually, he found himself slipping into a state of dreamy lethargy, a sensuous velvet feeling creeping over his hand. Mrs M had come across the room and bent over him, her fingertips playing on the back of his hand. Her hair hung in a riot of curls: she was no longer middle aged but young and beautiful. Crowley came to his senses and moved his hand away. At this, she recoiled from him then advanced, more beautiful than before and as agile as a cat. Suddenly, she sprang upon him and tried to press her lips to his. He caught her and held her at arm's length. As if she were a vampire, a greenish aura played about her curled hair, which changed from blond into grey. Her skin wrinkled and her eyes dulled. She metamorphosed into a crone and scuttled from the room, dribbling. How true the story is cannot be assessed: when Crowley recounted it to Gerald Kelly, the artist pooh-poohed it as pure fiction.

The door was finally closed on any relationship with Mathers when Crowley, accompanied by George Cecil Jones, broke into Mathers' rue Saint-Vincent apartment one night to retrieve magical robes and artefacts Crowley had purchased and considered he owned.

It had been Crowley's intention, after his global trip, to settle down to studying and conducting the Abramelin Operation, yet his falling out with Mathers and his interest in Buddhism distracted him. Crowley considered himself at this time a sort of quasi-Buddhist and, as such, believed that nature was far more important than humanity. Value judgments were to be overturned for, he thought, if 'anything were worth while, it could only be discovered by turning one's back on temporal things.' This cynical opinion was to be a cornerstone in his life.

Paris, when Crowley arrived there late in 1902, was a lively and invigorating city. *La belle époque* was building, artistic life vibrant. Clive Bell, in his memoirs, wrote of Paris in the early years of the century as a city of *cafés chantants*, bars and bistros, music halls and bordellos, 'a city of horse-omnibuses and yellow fiacres and drivers with shiny white "toppers" . . . of good living

and low prices.' On this visit, Crowley stayed until March 1903 but, for many years to come, he was to be a very frequent visitor to the city.

The artistic world within which Crowley was to move, introduced to him by Gerald Kelly, was one he greatly enjoyed. Here he readily fitted in among the many eccentrics who indulged themselves, living the life of the artistic *bon viveur*. In England, Crowley observed, any 'spark of individuality is an outrage on decency' yet, in France, individuality was encouraged, artists and thinkers being universally accepted, respected, even venerated.

Kelly, quick-witted, cultured and charming, had lived in Paris for over a year and was quickly making a name for himself as an artist. Well connected in the intellectual world, he knew the elderly Impressionist painters Claude Monet and Edgar Degas, the sculptors Auguste Rodin and Aristide Maillol, and was a close friend of the author Marcel Schwob. He painted portraits for good money, supplementing this income with landscapes, his first paintings being hung at the Salon d'Automne in 1902. They were portraits of his sister, Rose, who had stayed with him for some months

Like Crowley, Kelly was a ladies' man. He fell in and out of love with impulsive regularity, and was almost married on one occasion to a woman called Sybil Meugins or, as some would have it, Muggins. One of Kelly's two sisters, probably Rose, rushed to Paris to issue the family's ultimatum: if he wed, his allowance would be cut. By the time the sister arrived, however, Kelly had grown tired of the woman and called off their engagement. It is highly likely that Kelly and Crowley shared the same woman from time to time, and they may have been sporadic homosexual lovers. On occasion, Crowley would sign himself Maud in letters to Kelly.

Through Kelly, Crowley met Rodin at the old man's studio. At the time, Rodin was being lambasted in the press for his statue of the French writer Honoré de Balzac. Crowley disagreed with the critics and wrote a sonnet about the sculpture. Rodin, pleased by this young man's praise, suggested that Crowley

write poems for each of his major pieces. Crowley, flattered and eager to oblige, wrote a number of poems subsequently published as *Rodin in Rime*, the text illustrated by lithographs supplied by the sculptor.

Another person Kelly introduced Crowley to was Marcel Schwob. A noted essayist and scholar, Schwob lived in a sumptuously appointed apartment on the Île St Louis with his wife and a Chinese manservant. Schwob's life was not easy. Society periodically avoided him. He was subjected to anti-Semitic attacks, his wife, Marguerite Moréno, had been an actress, and it was said he slept with the Chinese servant. Despite being a partial social pariah, Schwob held literary gatherings at his home and it was through them Crowley met a number of writers. One of these was Arnold Bennett.

In his early thirties, Bennett, who at the time called himself Enoch Arnold Bennett, had published his first important novel *Anna of the Five Towns*, in 1902. He had moved to Paris and rented an apartment at 4 rue du Calais in Montmartre. He was a socially awkward and occasionally uncouth character, and Crowley found him 'very ill at ease to find himself in Paris in polite society', yet he added, 'he was very much pleased by the generous measure of respect which he received on all hands simply for being a novelist. His speech and his appearance attracted no insult from literary circles in Paris.' They became acquaintances, Crowley gaining enjoyment from showing Bennett a taste of the high life he, as a wealthy raconteur, could afford.

One example of Crowley's magnanimity was recorded by both himself and Bennett in their diaries for April 1904. Crowley invited the novelist out to lunch at Paillards. A small and unostentatious restaurant, it was considered one of the best in Paris. Crowley noted how his guest 'was completely overpowered by the deference of the maître d'hôtel, who knew me very well, and his embarrassment at being introduced to such splendours was childishly charming,' and remarked how his 'accent and dialect' – Bennett came from Staffordshire and had not lost his north country enunciation – 'made his English delightfully difficult.' Bennett's diary entry read,

'In response to a telegram I went to lunch with Aleister Crowley ... He had been made a "Khan" in the East, and was wearing a heavily-jewelled red waistcoat, and the largest ring I ever saw on a human hand. I rather liked him. He said some brain specialist had told him that what made a great brain was not the number of facts or ideas known, but the number of facts or ideas co-ordinated and co-related. I said: "Of course."' Crowley made such a lasting impression upon Bennett, with his garish waistcoats and extravagantly large ring, that the novelist used him in his Parisian memoir, *Paris Nights*, where Crowley is referred to as The Mahatma.

Crowley frequently ate at Paillards. Clive Bell was taken there by him once but was not dressed for the occasion. Crowley dismissed this. They were shown to a table before Crowley vanished, only to return to report he had told the mâitre d'hôtel that Bell was a Russian prince. The dress code was subsequently ignored. Bell later remembered that when they left Crowley, not uncharacteristically, questioned the bill.

Another of Crowley's favourite haunts was a restaurant called Le Chat Blanc in the rue d'Odessa, above which there was a narrow room in which met 'a sort of international clique of writers, painters, sculptors, students and their friends', most of them expatriate British and Americans. The menu had a fixed price of two francs fifty. In his introduction to *Snowdrops from a Curate's Garden*, a book he wrote in 1904, Crowley referred to it as 'Au Chien Rouge', describing himself and Kelly in the group as 'D— and L—, the one poet and philosopher, the other painter, and – I fear pederast. Twins in thought, the two were invincible in argument and they were supreme in the respective arts ... Dreaded as they were by the charlatan, no set of men could have been more genial, more fraternal. United by a bond of mutual respect, even where they differed ... they formed a noble and harmonious group, the like of which has perhaps never yet been seen.' Crowley's inferring that Kelly was a pederast, which he almost certainly was not, nevertheless hints at their sexual intimacy.

While Crowley enjoyed the company of the restaurant, he

knew there were also 'a number of fleas on the Chat Blanc; men whose association with art was a sort of superstition, men who bored us and yet were as difficult to get rid of as the lumber that accumulates in a house. But sometimes a stranger would introduce a new note of genuine amusement.' One of the fleas was an American artist called Penrhyn Stanlaws, who made a very substantial living 'by dashing off a succession of spidery scrawls representing fluffy American flappers in various attitudes', these being risqué. Crowley considered Stanlaws to have 'all the fascination of a new penny toy.'

Yet there was to be one writer Crowley met at Le Chat Blanc who was to be fascinated by him and was soon to make him the main character in a novel. Born in Paris in 1874, his name was William Somerset Maugham.

When they first met is uncertain, but the most likely date is during one of Crowley's visits to Paris in 1904. Once again, Gerald Kelly was instrumental in the introduction. His sister, Rose, was friendly with the wife of Charles, Maugham's elder brother, a lawyer running the Paris office of the family law firm, with whom the novelist had come to stay.

Maugham did not impress Crowley. The young novelist, he thought, 'claimed to have ambitions to become a man of letters and his incapacity was so obvious that I am afraid we were cruel enough to make him the butt of our wit when he visited the Chat Blanc.' His work was 'vamped over, his plagiarisms were beyond belief for impudence', but he allowed that his imagination was 'original and vigorous.' The Canadian artist James Wilson Morrice was Maugham's main tormentor, but it was Crowley of whom Maugham was to take most notice.

As a novelist, Maugham was captivated by Crowley. He considered him a braggart and a charlatan yet enigmatic, paradoxical, and ripe for fictional exploitation. In the first six months of 1907, Maugham wrote a novel entitled *The Magician*. The magician, of course, was Crowley. Others of the Le Chat Blanc crowd were fairly transparently portrayed in the story. Morrice was called Warren. Another of Maugham's

hated artistic teasers, the American artist Roderic O'Conor, became O'Brien. Crowley's name was Oliver Haddo.

In an introduction to a 1956 reprint of his novel, Maugham wrote of Crowley:

> *I took an immediate dislike to him, but he interested and amused me. He was a great talker and he talked uncommonly well. In early youth, I was told, he was extremely handsome, but when I knew him he had put on weight, and his hair was thinning. He had fine eyes and a way, whether natural or acquired I do not know, of so focusing them that, when he looked at you he seemed to look behind you. He was a fake, but not entirely a fake. He was a liar and unbecomingly boastful, but the odd thing was that he had actually done some of the things he boasted of. Crowley told fantastic stories of his experiences, but it was hard to say whether he was telling the truth or merely pulling your leg.*

Although Maugham made no attempt to disguise the identity of Oliver Haddo, he was 'by no means a portrait of him. I made my character more sinister and more ruthless than Crowley ever was. I gave him magical powers that Crowley, though he claimed them, certainly never possessed.' Nevertheless, at the time he was writing this introduction, Maugham told Christopher Isherwood that he had only ever known two really evil men: Crowley was one of them.

An arrogant, tall, verbose and fleshy man, Haddo enters the novel with his arrival at the Chien Noir. He calls the waitress Marie, which was the name of the Le Chat Blanc waitress, and says, '"... disembarrass me of this coat of frieze. Hang my sombrero upon a convenient peg." Spotting Warren, he says: "I grieve to see, O most excellent Warren, that the ripe juice of the apéritif has glazed your sparkling eye."' Morrice was famous for being frequently drunk. The plot unfolds when Haddo is rejected by a young woman upon whom he wreaks his revenge by casting her under a spell and sacrificing her in an experiment to make homunculi. Crowley's reputation in

Paris, while not going as far as this, certainly suggested he had a power over women.

When *The Magician* was published in 1908, Crowley was exceedingly surprised. Here he was in fiction. Haddo lived in a house called Skene, patently Boleskine, and the character echoed Crowley's conversations with Maugham, even using his phraseology. Crowley realised Maugham, 'had taken some of the most private and personal incidents of my life ... He had added a number of the many absurd legends of which I was the central figure. He had patched all these together by innumerable strips of paper clipped from the books which I had told Gerald [Kelly] to buy. I had never supposed that plagiarism could have been so varied, extensive, and shameless.' It was, he surmised, an 'amusing hotchpotch of stolen goods.'

Crowley was not so much angered as affronted by Maugham's plagiarisms, yet he got his own back by reviewing the novel in the 30 December, 1908 edition of the magazine, *Vanity Fair*. Signing the article Oliver Haddo, he pointed out the main instances of plagiarism, giving the parallel original text from books by Mathers, Eliphas Lévi, H.G. Wells and Alexandre Dumas, among others. Frank Harris, the editor of *Vanity Fair*, refused to believe Crowley, who had to bring the books round to the editorial office to prove his criticism. Several weeks later, Maugham and Crowley met. Maugham, by way of a put-down, indicated a few literary thefts Crowley had missed. Crowley, stating that his review had been edited for space, said to Maugham, 'I almost wish you were an important writer.' This was not the slur it might be supposed: Crowley meant it. If Maugham had been important and famous, his literary advertisement would have done Crowley – or his ego and reputation – a considerable service. He later remarked, 'I must thank [Maugham] for recording some of my actual repartees ... I was not in the least offended by the attempts of the book to represent me as, in many ways, the most atrocious scoundrel, for he had done more than justice to the qualities of which I was proud ... He attributed to me certain characteristics which he meant to represent as abominable, but were actually superb

. . . [The book] was, in fact, an appreciation of my genius such as I had never dreamed of inspiring.' An indication of Crowley's acceptance of the book lies in the fact that he later used Oliver Haddo as a pen name.

By March 1903, Crowley was growing restless once more. It was never long before he tired of anywhere or anything. He was easily bored, hated the mundane, the routine, and was ever in search of new experiences. Travelling afforded the quickest and easiest release from the banal. He wrote of his restlessness, 'every new scene, every new point of view, is welcome. I want to be taught. I want to enlarge my mind.' Nothing was closed to him and, in his autobiography, written in middle age, he states,

> *I am incurable, though I have had all the good things of life, nearly all my life, though I no longer value them or enjoy them for themselves I still enjoy the idea of them I embrace hardship and privation with ecstatic delight, I want everything that the world holds; I would go to prison or the scaffold for the sake of the experience I have never grown out of the infantile belief that the universe was made for me to suck I grow delirious to contemplate the delicious horrors that are certain to happen to me. This is the keynote of my life, the untrammelled delight in every possibility of existence potential or actual.*

His restive travelling need not have been to exotic places overseas: between 1902 and 1905 he vacillated between London, Boleskine and Paris almost at whim. Never having had the restrictions of everyday employment, nor as a largely self financing writer ever having had to face deadlines, he could indulge himself and, until his money ran out later in life, he was forever on the move.

He had had enough of Paris for the time being The city's attraction was wearing thin and its atmosphere was getting at him to such an extent that he even got engaged, but broke the affair off when he realised he had 'drifted under the lee shore

of matrimony out of sheer lack of moral energy.' That said, the love affair produced a number of poems, including 'The Kiss' and 'Lileen' (possibly the temporary fiancée's name), but these will have meant nothing to her. By all accounts, she was not one of womanhood's brightest sparks. Crowley lent her the manuscript of *The Sword of Song*, which he completed in Paris and passed to Philippe Renouard, a Parisian publisher and printer, to produce in a limited edition of five hundred copies. In it, Crowley mentioned having studied Eliphas Levi and the cryptic Coptic. One day, she asked Kelly, for whom she posed, what Coptic meant. He replied it was the language of the ancient Copts. To this, she enquired the meaning of cryptic. He, Crowley reported, said it was the language spoken by the ancient Crypts, howled with laughter and 'abandoned hope of humanity'.

Other women in Crowley's life during his four months in Paris included an Englishwoman who was addicted to inhaling ether, an acrobat and model with a face as 'round and hard and small and pretty' as a boot button, and Nina Olivier, whom Crowley referred to in a poem as a 'laughing little light of wickedness.' Many of them were the subjects of his collection of poems *The Star and the Garter*, published in 1903; the Star was his fiancée and the Garter was Nina, who later became well known in Paris as a courtesan.

Just before he departed for London, Crowley became peripherally involved in one of the big scandals of the day. It concerned Major-General Sir Hector Archibald Macdonald, a hero of the Sudanese campaign and the Boer War and now Governor of Ceylon, who had been accused by both Earl Roberts and King Edward VII of homosexuality in Ceylon, where a court martial was going to try him in April. He arrived in Paris on 20 March, *en route* to Marseilles and Colombo. Four days later, Crowley 'dropped into the Hotel Regina in Paris ... At the next table, also alone, was Sir Hector Macdonald. He recognised me and invited me to join him He seemed unnaturally relieved; but his conversation showed that he was suffering acute mental distress. He told me that he was on his

way to the East. Of course I avoided admitting that I knew his object, which was to defend himself against charges of sexual irregularity brought against him in Ceylon.' The following morning, the scandal broke in the French edition of the *New York Herald*: Macdonald purchased a copy, went up to his hotel room and shot himself. Two years on, when Crowley was again in Ceylon, he met a group of Scottish Elders seeking to clear Macdonald's name. Theirs was a difficult task, for there were seventy-seven witnesses in support of the accusation. Crowley set their minds at rest somewhat by saying that he would not trust one witness, adding, the 'more unanimous they are, the more it is certain that they have been bribed to lie.'

Crowley left Paris in April for London, where he met Eckenstein, the two of them travelling overnight by train to Inverness and on to Boleskine. Crowley left his wallet, containing £150, under his pillow in their sleeping compartment on the train and was loath to go back for it. Eckenstein, however, was adamant. They returned to the station, were walked down to the shunting yard and retrieved the wallet. If Eckenstein had not been with him, it would have been an instance, as Crowley would have put it, of not letting financial considerations dictate his life.

While he had been away, Boleskine had gathered a local reputation. 'I have little doubt,' Crowley stated, 'that the Abra Melin devils, whatever they are, used the place as convenient headquarters and put in some of their spare time in terrifying the natives.' This, allied to the fact that the house was reputedly haunted by the severed head of Simon Fraser, Lord Lovat, who had been executed in 1747 for his support of Bonnie Prince Charlie, made the locals doubly afraid of nearing it. People travelling up the loch-shore road at night would rather take the high, lonely road through Gleann Liath than pass close to the house. Crowley claimed he heard the head rolling along the corridors or, later, around the billiard table, but this was unlikely: that the house was in fact built as a hunting lodge for a member of the Lovat family, but some time after Lovat's

beheading, seems to have been overlooked. Crowley was just adding to his mystique with a bit of japery.

For a short while, he and Eckenstein fished in the loch and climbed the nearby mountains but, when Eckenstein departed, boredom set in again, relieved only by the occasional visitor and Crowley's resident factor, Louis Charles Richard Duncombe Jewell, the son of a Plymouth Brother whom Crowley had known in Streatham. Jewell had renounced his family faith for Catholicism, which enamoured him to Crowley, who invited him to visit then offered him the post. Jewell, who called himself Ludovic Cameron, wore a kilt and was a keen sportsman and Jacobite, gladly accepted.

Normally, magic would have occupied Crowley's time when he was without visitors, but for even this he was unable to raise any enthusiasm. Instead, he read and fished and amused himself with a prank he played on the Vigilance Society. Based in London, this was to immoral vice what the Temperance Society was to alcohol. Crowley wrote to the secretary, complaining of the prevalence of prostitutes in Foyers, the tiny village a little over a mile from Boleskine. The society investigated and reported that they could find no conspicuous evidence of prostitution in the settlement. Crowley replied tartly that it was 'conspicuous by its absence, you fools.'

For a month, from 16 June to 12 July 1903, Crowley vegetated. He lacked any 'driving force and the complete disappearance of any enthusiasm' and even wrote no poetry, finding the 'fount of lyric poetry had run completely dry.'

His life, however, was soon to take a dramatic and very unexpected turn.

On 13 July, Crowley went to Edinburgh to restock the Boleskine wine cellar, 'pick up some kind of companion-housekeeper' and meet Gerald Kelly, whom he was going to accompany on his way to Strathpeffer Spa, forty miles north of Boleskine, where his mother was taking a cure. While staying in Edinburgh, the muse returning to him, Crowley penned a brief play, *The God-Eater*.

He invited Kelly to stop over in Boleskine and the artist

accepted. They travelled to Inverness by train, then down Loch Ness by boat to Foyers. Yet even with Kelly present, boredom settled in again. The housekeeper, whom Crowley referred to in his autobiography as 'Red headed Arabella', had not yet arrived from Edinburgh to take up her post and was therefore not on hand to satisfy Crowley's domestic or sexual desires. (She was, however, his idea of the perfect woman, one whom he could 'take down from the shelves when required and who can be trusted to stay on them when not.') To alleviate his boredom, Crowley tried Buddhist meditation, to little effect. His spirits were raised only when he was invited to join the Kellys in Strathpeffer Spa. He set off wearing his full Highland regalia and looking every inch the Scottish laird.

At the spa, Crowley found Kelly, his mother Blanche, sister Rose and a middle-aged solicitor named Hill who was trying to court Rose and was, in Crowley's opinion, 'the tamest and dullest specimen of humanity that I had ever met.' Several days later, on 11 August, Crowley fell into conversation with Rose, who confided in him that she was in serious trouble.

A little over a year older than Crowley, Rose was widowed. She had lived for two years in South Africa with her first husband, a Royal Army Medical Corps major called Skerritt, but he had died in 1897. Their marriage had lacked sparkle. Currently, she was engaged to an American called Howell, who had been up at Cambridge with Gerald Kelly. The intended marriage was essentially arranged by her mother. In the meantime, she had been having an affair with a married man named Frank Summers. Her family had got wind of this, for Rose, needing money, had lied to her mother, saying she was pregnant in order to obtain forty pounds for an abortion. The money was spent on fripperies.

Men fell easily for Rose. She was not only very attractive but a flirt. Crowley wrote of her: 'Physically and morally, Rose exercised on every man she met a fascination which I have never seen anywhere else, not a fraction of it. She was like a character in a romantic novel, a Helen of Troy or a Cleopatra; yet, while more passionate, unhurtful. She was essentially a good woman.'

He described her as having a 'figure perfect, neither too big nor little, face pretty without being pretty; she only missed Beauty by lacking Goethe's "touch of the bizarre." Personality intensely powerful and magnetic; intellect absent but mind adaptable to that of any companion, so that she could always say the right nothing. Charm, grace, vitality, tact, manners, all inexpressibly fascinating.'

When Crowley heard Rose's story, he was outraged. He had had his own fill of family autocracy and he felt for her. He also fell, if not in love with her, under the spell of her flirtatious charm. His answer to her dilemma was simple and typical of his impulsive nature. She should marry him, then, with the knot tied, he would return to Boleskine and she could go off to the arms of Summers and never see him again. It was, to say the least, an outlandish solution, but Rose accepted it. Crowley admitted their plan to Kelly, who thought it was one of Crowley's pranks. But it wasn't.

Crowley ascertained that, if they approached the county sheriff and expressed a mutual desire to wed, he could marry them on the spot. He later wrote he had 'the instinctive feeling natural to a young man, that he is somehow or other putting his foot in it, that he is invoking unknown gods.' Undeterred, he decided to go through with it and the following morning, 12 August — ironically, the first day of the grouse-shooting season – he and Rose left before dawn for the sheriff's office in Dingwall.

The short train journey was somewhat strained. Even Crowley was to admit their 'relations were rather peculiar, when all was said and done', but he was mollified by the thought that he 'wasn't going to have to live with her. All I had to do was emancipate her.'

Arriving in Dingwall, they found the sheriff's house. He was still in bed, but his maid informed them that any lawyer could do the job and directed them to one. Before breakfast, in front of Alexander Ross of Tulloch Street, Dingwall, they consented to be married and declared themselves husband and wife. Ross and his clerk were the witnesses. Crowley gave his name as Aleister

Crowley MacGregor, Landed Proprietor (Bachelor); Rose was Rose Skerritt MacGregor (Widow). Crowley, wearing his kilt and sporran, then pulled his dirk from its sheath and kissed it to pledge his troth: and that was it.

While all this was going on, Kelly, finding that Rose had essentially absconded with Crowley, was travelling to the town on the next train to try to stop proceedings. He was too late. All that remained was to register the marriage with the sheriff.

After the ceremony, bride and groom parted, Rose going back to Strathpeffer Spa and Crowley catching the next Loch Ness steamer bound for Foyers. On the journey, Crowley's mind must have been in turmoil. He certainly had serious misgivings about his actions. Usually, whatever rash impulse he succumbed to had no lasting or important – or legally binding – ramifications. Now, in less than twenty-four hours, he had gone from gay bachelordom to husband, albeit by agreement *in absentia*.

When Rose reached Strathpeffer Spa, there was hell to pay. Her mother was livid. Gerald Kelly was furious. Hill, the solicitor, tried to have the marriage annulled. Duncombe Jewell was sent from Boleskine to mediate. In fact, although the marriage was legal, it was not complete until registered. Either Crowley or Rose could have pulled out. Yet they did not and, on 17 August, Sheriff-Substitute Alex Dewar of Ross, Cromarty and Sutherland issued the marriage warrant in Dingwall.

This done, the newlyweds, far from going on honeymoon, took the train to the Kyle of Lochalsh on the west coast of Scotland and booked into the Station Hotel to talk things over. Crowley 'went to look at the sea and wish it weren't too cold to drown' himself in, consoled himself with champagne, scribbled a poem on a menu and joined Rose in their double room. He also felt himself falling in love. Whether or not they consummated their marriage in the room is unknown but it seems likely: Crowley was hardly one to miss the chance of a sexual romp and Rose, who had a masochistic streak, would have let him. They then returned to Boleskine, where Crowley had to act fast to ensure that Red-headed Arabella did not arrive on the scene: she was, after all, now redundant.

Settled in Boleskine, Crowley wrote to his mother,

I was sorry you would not come to the wedding – it was a very grand affair, plumed hearse & all, & the mutes recalled the delicious mutes of thirty years ago – The Rev F F Kelly the bride's father preached such a beautiful sermon over the open grave – His text was from the 44th. v. of the 44th chapt of Isaiah – 'And the Lord said unto Moses, and he arose and smote him' – 36 pipers played 'the voice that breathed o'er Eden' – some reference to Whistler whom her brother so much admires. – I suppose - & as the earth was shovelled reverently by 12 stalwart professors of Esperanto, taxidermists and assorted Mormon missionaries (with two such dear destroying angels) over the last mortal remains, a heartfelt sob of relief burst from the assembled multitudes, & tears of bitter joy streamed down, such profusion as to enable us to carry out our nearly abandoned project of beginning the honeymoon in a canoe – This we did & shot Barnes Bridge in the astonishing time of 2h 43m· 21 2s. Thence to the seas of molten glory in the glowing west where we still are, c/o God, Heaven, will always find us.

How Emily Crowley reacted to this ironic, almost Monty Pythonesque, correspondence is open to conjecture.

Gradually, the Kelly family accepted the situation, although the Rev. Frederick Festus Kelly tried to force Crowley to settle £10,000 on Rose. He was, predictably, unsuccessful. As for Crowley, he was falling deeply in love with his bride. 'Her love for me was evoking my love for her,' he wrote, describing her as 'one of the most beautiful and fascinating women in the world.' However, it was not long before he started shaping her into his ideal woman: 'Once, in the first three weeks or so, Rose took some trifling liberty; I recognized the symptoms, and turned her up and spanked her. She henceforth added the qualities of perfect wife to those of perfect mistress. Women, like all moral inferiors, behave well only when treated with

firmness, kindness and justice. They are always on the look-out to detect wavering or irritation in the master; and their one hope is to have a genuine grievance to hug.' Rose soon learned her place. Marriage, however, had a deleterious effect upon Crowley's creativity. With love and sex on tap, his 'life was a perfect lyric [but it] left no surplus energy to overflow into words. I wrote nothing.'

When the brouhaha of their marriage had died down, Crowley decided they should have a proper honeymoon, travelling to Ceylon for some hunting, then on to Rangoon to see Allan Bennett. They might, he thought, just as well go: nothing was happening at Boleskine. His happy state of marital bliss had affected him deeply. His poetry 'had petered out, so had my Magick and my meditation.' Via London, they went to Paris, where Crowley was reconciled to Gerald Kelly, writing to him before they met and requesting to be addressed in letters henceforth as Lord Boleskine: he intended, he declared, to use Aleister Crowley from now on merely as a *nom de plume*.

While in Paris, Crowley had a brush with the past. Walking over the Pont Alexandre III, he came across Moina Mathers. He alleged that she now looked like a streetwalker, with heavy make up and grimy skin where that ended. From this, he chose to deduce that Mathers had fallen on hard times and, Crowley liked to say, was sending his wife out to pose naked in a seedy cabaret in Montmartre, the black magic upon which Mathers was supposedly engaged wreaking its toll. This was probably Crowley taking the opportunity for revenge against Mathers. Moina, other reports state, was to retain her beauty for at least another decade.

From Paris, Crowley and Rose went by train to Marseilles and boarded a ship for Naples and Cairo, where they spent a night in the King's Chamber of the Great Pyramid at Giza. His motive was to make 'the gesture of the male showing off his plumage. I wanted my wife to see what a great Magician I was.' Purchasing Arab robes – a scarlet one for Crowley and a blue one for Rose – and taking his notebook of invocations with them, they lit a single candle by which Crowley began

to read an appropriate invocation. As he spoke, the chamber filled with a pale violet astral phosphorescent glow which grew to the intensity of brilliant moonlight. By morning, Rose was exhausted and Crowley was cock-a-hoop. He was, he declared, 'rather a fine fellow to have been able to produce so striking a phenomenon with so little trouble.' Yet even this success did not encourage him to return to magical matters.

By December, they were in Ceylon, travelling around the country, shooting game. The business of hunting satisfied Crowley. He enjoyed the thrill of the kill after the tedium of the stalk: a big-game hunt encapsulated the timetable of his life, being a long period of comparatively slow, concentrated activity followed by an adrenaline rush. He disdained hunting from a howdah on an elephant or a *machan* (a hunting platform hidden in a tree), preferring to be on foot, pitting his wits against those of his quarry. To the alarm of his native bearers, he often went out alone, armed either with a double-barrelled ten-bore Paradox or a .577 Express. Both could stop a large animal in its tracks, yet it took him nineteen bullets to drop a wild buffalo, considered a highly dangerous creature. Crowley was not a good shot and hunted, as indeed he climbed mountains, in order to boost his masculine self-image. The sadistic side of his character enjoyed killing, and he was able to rid himself of pent-up emotions by shooting animals, even though, at times, he considered himself little more than an assassin when doing it.

Staying at a *dak* bungalow by a lake, Crowley observed a colony of large flying foxes, a species of fruit bat, roosting in the trees of the shore. The creatures were renowned for their soft belly fur, and Crowley took it in mind to shoot enough to make himself a waistcoat and his wife a toque: it would be an ideal piece of headgear for her in the cold winters at Boleskine. That he would need at least three dozen seems not to have occurred to him. They set out in a duck punt, but no sooner had Crowley fired than the whole colony took to the wing. Crowley continued firing. A wounded bat fell on Rose, considerably frightening her. That night, Crowley was awakened by the sound of the squealing injured bat. He lit

a candle to discover Rose hanging bat-like, and naked, from the mosquito-net frame over their bed. Crowley got her down with difficulty but, once in his arms, she clawed, spat and bit him as if the bat had entered into her. The experience excited Crowley: his wife was not only beautiful but clearly had a soul open to possession and therefore the occult.

There was another explanation which Crowley allowed. Rose was by now pregnant, and her nightmare may have been due to her instinctively and subconsciously fighting to protect her unborn child.

In the light of Rose's condition, it was decided not to go on to Burma but to return to Boleskine. This decision was reinforced on 7 January 1904, when Rose came down with a fever. While she lay sweating, Crowley's muse returned, and he wrote a poem entitled 'Rosa Mundi', meaning Rose of the World. It was the first of a quartet of poems dedicated to Rose which were to be among Crowley's most famous literary work. Tautly written and technically good, it bears comparison with most other turn of-the-century lyrical love poetry, although it has its roots firmly in the poetic traditions of the late nineteenth century. Nineteen verses long, it is sustained and moving, as verses 12 and 13 illustrate:

Ay! let the coward and slave who writes write on!
He is no more harm to Love than the grey snake
Who lurks in the dusk brake
For the bare-legged village-boy, is to the Sun,
The Sire of Life.
The Lover and the Wife,
Immune, intact, ignore. The people hear;
Then, be the people smitten of grey Fear,
It is no odds.

I have seen the eternal Gods
Sit, star-wed, in old Egypt by the Nile;
The same calm pose, the inscrutable, wan smile
On every lip alike.

Time hath not had his will to strike
At them; they abide, they pass through all.
Though their most ancient names may fall,
They stir not nor are weary of
Life, for with them even as with us, Life is but Love
They know, we know; let, then, the writing go!
That, in the very deed, we do not know.

In this first of the quartet, Crowley later recorded, 'I sing to her, recall the incidents of the birth of our love, hint at the prospect of its harvest, and weave the whole of the facts into a glowing tapestry of rapture. It was a new rhythm, a new rime. It marks a notable advance on any previous work for sustained sublimity.' Even Eckenstein, who liked Rose but generally dismissed Crowley's verse as not much better than doggerel, thought it an exceptional love poem. When it was published, with other poems about Rose, under the pseudonym of D.H. Carr, Eckenstein was indignant. He believed it too personal for publication in the poet's lifetime.

Marriage did not prevent Crowley from desiring other women. As in the past, for example in Mexico City, he was drawn to women who were essentially unattractive. While staying with Rose at the Galle Face Hotel in Colombo, he came across an English mother and daughter of the worst sort. They were brash, loud and ostentatious. The daughter's brooch, made with diamonds in the shape of a coronet with her name (Mabel) on it, caused Crowley to record that he had 'never seen anything in such abominable taste, and anyhow I wouldn't call a trained flea Mabel, if I respected it.' Yet, as he recorded in his diary, 'The intensity of my repulsion makes me suspect that I wanted to make love to her and was annoyed that I was already in love. The gospels do not tell us whether the man who possessed the pearl of great price ever had moments of regret at having given up imitation jewellery. One always subconsciously connects notoriously vile women who flaunt their heartless and sexless seduction with the possibility of some supremely perverse pleasure in nastiness.'

With Burma and Allan Bennett no longer on their itinerary, Crowley and Rose sailed from Colombo on 28 January, heading for Cairo. Crowley could not have guessed it but the next three months were to bring him to 'the brink of the only event of my life which has made it worth living.'

8

The Arrival of Aiwass

Crowley and Rose arrived at Port Said on 8 February 1904 and reached Cairo the following day. Once again, Crowley's ego, sense of fun and love of the exotic came into play. They checked into their hotel under the assumed names of Prince and Princess Chioa Khan. Claiming to be a Persian prince with an exquisite English wife, Crowley had picked the name, pronounced *hiwa*, as he believed it was Hebrew for The Beast: Khan was merely a Middle Eastern title. It was his ambition to strut about the city wearing a diamond-studded turban and sword, with two runners clearing the way for his carriage.

To prevent anyone doubting his identity, he made it known that he had been promoted to the position by an (unnamed) Eastern potentate. Having notices printed to this effect, he mailed one to Rose's parents with a covering letter ordering them to address their correspondence to her in her new title. What the Vicar of Camberwell made of this can only be surmised, but Blanche Kelly acquiesced, although, on one envelope, she mischievously addressed her daughter as 'Princess Chioa Khan!': the exclamation mark was sufficient to have Crowley return it to sender.

Settled in Cairo, Crowley gave Rose the pet name of Ouarda (Arabic for a rose), set about learning sections of the Koran and employed an Arab to teach him Arabic and the basics of the Muslim faith. This was for a purpose: Crowley was toying with going to Mecca in disguise, as his hero Burton had done. Yet the Arab did more. He was knowledgeable in Muslim mysticism and lent Crowley several books on the subject. As if in counterpoint

to this, Crowley took up playing golf again and went pigeon- and quail-shooting.

Life was good to Crowley, his marriage being until now, in his own words, 'an uninterrupted sexual debauch.' It was about to be interrupted.

After a month or so of staying in a hotel and sightseeing at Helwan, the massive grave site dating to 3000 BC, Crowley rented an apartment in a house at a major junction on what is today Sharia 26 July, near the Bulaq Museum. They moved in on 14 March, Crowley adapting a north facing room as a temple in which, after months of magical inactivity, he started to invoke various ancient Egyptian deities, including Thoth, Isis, Apophis and Osiris. Two days later, almost half-heartedly, Crowley conducted the same ceremony he had carried out in the Great Pyramid of Giza. His aim was to raise the sylphs, beings inhabiting the realm of the element of air, so Rose might see them. What happened was unexpected.

According to Crowley, Rose 'was in a dazed state, stupid, possibly drunk; possibly hysterical from pregnancy. She could see nothing, but could hear.' In this condition, she kept on muttering. 'They are waiting for you.' At first, this annoyed Crowley. He regarded Rose, like all women, as his intellectual – and, therefore, magical - inferior. The truth was otherwise: she was not only very pretty, but also clever, if not an intellectual. On the other hand, he might have played down her abilities in order to make what happened next seem all the more impressive.

The next day, Crowley repeated the ceremony with the same result. On 18 March, Rose announced that Horus was waiting for Crowley. This set him back on his magical heels: on being asked, Rose had no idea who or what Horus was. Two days later, 20 March, Crowley received a message through Rose to the effect that '"The Equinox of the Gods had come"; that is, that a new epoch had begun. I was to formulate a link between the solar-spiritual force and mankind.'

It was on the following day, 21 March, that the first real bombshell hit. Rose took Crowley down the street to the museum and, after ignoring a number of statues, pointed to

a display case containing a painted wooden 26th Dynasty funerary stele covered in hieroglyphs and dedicated to a priest, Ankh-f-n-Khonsu. Upon it was painted the form of Horus, the Egyptian god, in his form as Ra-Hoor-Khuit. This, she announced from such a distance she could not read the exhibit label, was the one who was waiting. That the exhibit was listed number 666 in the museum catalogue did not escape Crowley.

Rose's sudden psychic awakening has puzzled many commentators. Some claim she was telepathically reporting Crowley's subconscious desires. Others feel she was genuinely psychic. Yet others state that she had been reading his magical notebooks and was merely repeating what she had heard her husband discussing. Certainly, Crowley told her of his magical as well as his ordinary life. What caused her to enter a dazed state may well have been the use of drugs. Crowley was known at the time to be taking – magically testing – certain substances, and he would have found hashish commonly available in Cairo. That Rose was pregnant might not have come into the equation: the risk drugs pose to a foetus were not widely known or accepted at the time.

With her new powers, Rose was more than Crowley's wife. She became his first Scarlet Woman.

A Scarlet Woman was the term used for a woman who was a medium directly in touch with the gods. She was also, in the form of Lady Babalon, considered the spiritual consort of The Beast 666, upon which she rode. Lady Babalon could reveal herself as a living human, which would be one of her lowest manifestations. In her highest state, she was Shakti, the partner of Shiva in the Hindu pantheon, with whom she was eternally locked in a sexual embrace from the continual orgasm of which came the foundation of the universe and everything in it. She was, in short, mistress of the masters of the universe and, therefore, of the Secret Chiefs.

Crowley believed the Secret Chiefs had, through his wife, sent him a signal promoting him to the position Mathers had vacated.

Rose informed Crowley, who was totally convinced that her communications were genuine, that the person who spoke

to and through her was neither Horus nor Ra-Hoor-Khuit but his messenger. His name was Aiwass, a Secret Chief of a very senior grade.

To understand all he could, Crowley commissioned a curator at the Bulaq Museum to translate the inscriptions on the stele into French but, soon after the translation was completed, Rose told Crowley he had to go to his temple at exactly noon on 8, 9 and 10 April, writing down everything he heard until exactly one o'clock, when he was to leave.

Crowley obeyed. At the appointed time on 8 April, he sat ready at a table with his Swan fountain pen poised and a pile of quarto-size notepaper at hand. On the stroke of noon, a voice began to speak to him from over his left shoulder. 'The voice,' he noted, 'was of deep timbre, musical and expressive, its tones solemn, voluptuous, tender, fierce or aught else as suited the moods of the message. Not bass – perhaps a rich tenor or baritone.' Crowley took down Aiwass's spiritual dictation: it was not easy keeping up his pace. At exactly one o'clock, the voice stopped and Crowley put his pen down. By the end of the third day, Crowley had written down all three sections of what he entitled *The Book of the Law*.

During the dictation sessions, Crowley was instructed not to look at Aiwass, but he stole a quick peek at him. His Holy Guardian Angel, as he considered Aiwass to be, hovered upon a faint cloud, as if of smoke. He 'seemed to be a tall, dark man in his thirties, well knit, active and strong, with the face of a savage king, and eyes veiled lest their gaze should destroy what they saw.' This powerful impression was 'a sort of visualization in the imagination.' It was not, he claimed, unusual for him 'to receive intimations in this manner.'

Aiwass's name was important. The spirit did not convey how his name was spelt but Crowley used two versions, Aiwass in experiments of a magical nature and Aiwaz for the mystical. Both were numerologically important. Furthermore, Aiwass was a messenger to Hoor Paar-Kraat, also known as Set, the god of destruction, the murderous brother of Osiris, whom he killed. His other names included Shaitan, the Arabic root from which

comes the word Satan. In short, Crowley's Guardian Angel was perceivably none other than a messenger of the Devil himself, a fact Crowley seems to have accepted. Many years later, in 1920, he wrote, 'And Her [the Scarlet Woman's] Concoction shall be sweet in our mixed mouths, the Sacrament that giveth thanks to Aiwaz, our Lord God the Devil.'

This matter of names begs a question over which there has been some puzzlement. Where did the name come from? Rose may well have heard it from the gods, but she might just as readily have constructed it from Crowley's current pseudonym. Chioa (or Hiwa) could quite easily have begotten Aiwaz. It is not beyond the bounds of possibility that she was using – albeit subconsciously – her temporary 'royal' name. On the other hand, if one is thoroughly sceptical, this may have been an example of Rose's cleverness. She may well have guessed by now that if she did not play along with Crowley's magical ambitions, he would abandon or leave her and this was her insurance.

The Book of the Law, also called *Liber Legis*, was in effect a prose poem in three chapters in which was announced the coming of a new age, the Aeon of Horus, commencing in 1904. Crowley was its prophet and the religion was destined to overthrow all other established religions where the acolytes were held in thrall by their gods. Its primary concept was based upon total self-fulfilment and the idea that 'every man and woman is a star': which is to say, every individual is unique and has the divine right to develop as it sees fit.

In some ways, Crowley's new work was like Nietzsche's *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, offering a new philosophy. In others, it was somewhat less than original, if not imitative. John Dee, the sixteenth-century mathematician, magician, alchemist and favourite of Elizabeth I, had written 'Do that which most pleaseth you', while the fifteenth-century comic satirist and Benedictine monk François Rabelais was famous for the dictum '*Fay ce que vouldras*'. There was another important similarity. Rabelais wrote of a fictitious Abbaye de Théleme on the banks of the River Loire in which all hypocrisy and cant were lampooned, mocked and criticised.

The law of Crowley's book was simple and in its entirety known as the Law of Thelema, *thelema* being the Greek for will. Through carrying out the Abramelin rites, members of the Golden Dawn were said to be aspiring towards it, yet it was Crowley who was successful, reaching a higher level of achievement. By attaining it, Crowley was instrumental in seeing the new epoch born: it was as if his magical achievement triggered it. The previous age had been that of Osiris, symbolised by dying gods like Jesus Christ. The new age was that of Horus, the sun god, a symbol of man's eternal self.

In the book appeared a phrase for which Crowley was to become – and remains – famous or infamous, depending upon one's point of view. It was a Rabelaisian 'Do what thou wilt shall be the whole of the Law'. Crowley explained the meaning of the dictum by saying that 'everything springs with absolute logic from the singular principle, "Do what thou wilt shall be the whole of the Law." Or, to put it another way, "There is no law beyond Do what thou wilt." And, "Thou hast no right but to do thy will." . . . The theory is that every man and every woman has each definite attributes whose tendency, considered in due relation to environment, indicate a proper course of action in each case. To pursue this course of action is to do one's true will. "Do that and no other shall say nay."' In other words, every individual has a right to autonomy, to develop as he sees fit, to find a way of life compatible with his most basic wishes and true will, but in harmony with his surroundings. It was the individual's right to develop himself, spiritually and intellectually, to the best of his potential, a central tenet of the philosophy of the modern British education system as incorporated into the Education Act of 1944. Some of Crowley's ideas were, therefore, not only ahead of their time but eventually became governmental policy.

In his opinion, nothing had the right to remove this fundamental prerogative, and Crowley's phrase that everyone was 'a star' meant that every human is an individual, not, as he put it, a replicable unit which should not – indeed, cannot – be undermined by any petty tyranny such as established religion

or rule of law. A person who had discovered and assimilated his true will was, in Crowley's terminology, a 'genius' whose life was beyond that of the everyday automaton living in an industrialised, organised and rigidly ordered civilisation. If there was one thing Crowley could not and would not accept it was the conditioning of people by the powers that be in society. He was one for overthrowing such despotism, freeing mankind from what he called Silly Gods and Foolish Devils.

Crowley's 'Do what thou wilt ...' phrase was to be augmented by another saying, 'Love is the law; love under will'. It was an extension of the know-thyself doctrine for which Crowley stood, yet many of his critics have incorrectly interpreted both dicta as being a licence to moral permissiveness. That said, it must be admitted there were times when Crowley himself chose to interpret them this way, too.

The origin of *The Book of the Law* has been the subject of much conjecture. There are those who consider it was Crowley's conscious work, the story of his writing it an invention to give it a magical spin. They draw attention to stylistic similarities with Crowley's other writings and to the ideas and teachings of the Golden Dawn: Crowley, needless to say, refuted this. Another opinion has it being his subconscious work, risen to the surface of his mind with the encouragement of meditation, drugs or the promptings of his inner spirit. There is also the assertion, believed by Crowley, that it was given to him by the Secret Chiefs through Aiwass. In the long run, it does not really matter: what is important is that the work was written and heralded a new philosophy, a new religion of which it was the seminal work and Crowley the sage superior. It must be added that, without it, Crowley would have been, in magical terms, nothing out of the ordinary. It was this central anchor, and the Law of Thelema, which put him above all his occult peers.

Uncharacteristically, once Crowley had finished the book, he did not rush it into publication. He employed a typist to type it up and wrote to Eckenstein, Bennett and Jones – and Mathers – to tell them he was about to proclaim the dawn of a new epoch: but that was all he did. In fact, Crowley

resented the book. He was at loggerheads with its principles and wrote that he was 'not even proud that the choice of the Secret Chiefs had fallen upon me; I was too well aware of my incapacity and indolence.' Putting him in charge of making public their innermost secrets rendered him both frightened and reluctant. Partly, he felt he was unworthy, but he was also wary of publishing such an outspoken tract, as he considered it. It may well be that he was afraid not so much of his awesome responsibility to the Secret Chiefs as of being ridiculed by the public for having the arrogance to proclaim himself the voice of a new religion, or attacked by the Golden Dawn, Mathers and the like, for disseminating the Secret Chiefs' Secret Knowledge, which he had always been taught should never be made public to non-initiates.

Resenting the book, partly because it went counter to the vaguely Buddhist ideals he was following at the time, Crowley put it aside after it had been typed. For many years he ignored it, mislaid the manuscript (which was finally unearthed in the attic at Boleskine) and pretended it did not exist. Yet, years into the future, he was drawn back to it as its meaning impinged itself upon him.

The book did serve one immediate purpose. It showed Crowley that he was in direct touch with the Secret Chiefs. This put him one above Mathers, whom Crowley thought had lost contact with them, and meant that, with the Secret Chiefs on-side, Crowley was at liberty, at last, to found his own magical society.

In the early summer of 1904, Crowley and his Scarlet Woman left Egypt, heading for home via Paris. On the way, Crowley wrote to Mathers. The gist of the letter was that the Secret Chiefs had dismissed Mathers, Crowley was now their man, and he had in his possession their concept of *thelema*, which made him the head of any order or society. He also decided that a new era, the Aeon of Horus, had begun with the dictation of *The Book of the Law* on 8 April: henceforth, the calendar would not date from the birth of Christ but from 1904, and the abbreviation AD (Anno Domini) would be replaced by

EV (Era Vulgaris), otherwise the Common Era. Mathers, it is thought, ignored all this.

Stopping only a short while in Paris, Crowley and Rose headed back to Boleskine, the establishment now being run by Crowley's Aunt Annie, who lived in the Brown Lodge as a resident housekeeper. The birth of Rose's child drawing near, Crowley employed an obstetrician, Dr Percival Bott, to stay in the house to deliver the baby. Another doctor, a surgeon called Ivor Back, also came to stay. He was an old associate of Kelly and Crowley from Cambridge; they had met him in Paris where he was one of their cronies at Le Chat Blanc. One can understand how Crowley got along with Back when one discovers that his only two stated interests in life were golf and talking.

For the rest of the summer, Crowley played host to an assortment of guests. While he may have been reluctant to open his wallet in public, Crowley was invariably a generous host in private, and his house parties were 'a glorious time at Boleskine. What with the salmon and the venison and my cellar, billiards and rock scrambling, the good company and the perfect summer, life passed like an ecstatic dream.'

As well as entertaining, Crowley set about improving Boleskine. He had a pond dug at the top of the property, beneath the rocky crags, fed by the spring which provided the house with its water. The spring itself was made into a sacred spring with rocks and plants. In a nearby paddock, he started to build a small golf course, while a plumber installed a central heating system which was to remain in place until overhauled in the 1990s.

With no overseas travel planned, Crowley turned his attention to his publishing activities, working in conjunction with such publishers as Kegan Paul and Charles Watts & Co., and using high-quality printers like the Chiswick Press.

To say that Crowley was a poor businessman is to understate: he had no idea of how to distribute and make a profit from his books. In fairness, this was not his prime intention. He felt it his duty to make his works available to the public, for their enlightenment rather than his enrichment. That this was

arrogant is obvious. Yet, had he been efficient in business, he would have spread his work more widely and more would have read him: his duty would have been further discharged. Certainly, much of his work was not worth the price, but there was a good deal that was and could have earned him a literary reputation.

Crowley set high production values and controlled every stage of manufacture, deciding typefaces, paper and bindings, always looking for the best. His books were as much works of the art of printing as they were of literature. As well as deciding production standards, Crowley also determined the price and publication date. He preferred to publish on the equinox or solstice. Every volume can be seen as an expression of Crowley himself, of his tastes and magic. The colour of paper and binding, the size of the books, even the retail price usually had an esoteric significance.

Between 1898 and 1905, Crowley published seventeen books, all in limited editions beyond the financial reach of most readers Few copies sold, several sold less than twenty copies, while two titles, *An Appeal to the American Republic* and *The Mother's Tragedy*, sold not one copy. Even a cheap shilling edition of *The Star & the Garter* flopped.)

This failure was partly due to Crowley's publishers' lack of effort: they had not invested a penny in the books so they had no vested interest in them. Consequently, Crowley decided to found his own publishing company, the Society for the Propagation of Religious Truth (SPRT : the name was a play upon the Anglican Church's Society for the Promotion of Christian Knowledge. The company's registered office was given as Boleskine. This established, Crowley embarked upon an ambitious publishing programme, bringing out *The Argonauts, The Sword of Song, The Book of the Goetia of Solomon the King, Why Jesus Wept* and *In Residence* in 1904, with *Oracles, Orpheus, Rosa Mundi* and the first volume of his collected works the following year. He also took back the stocks of unsold books from his previous publishers and, in some instances, had SPRT leaves inserted into them

Of this sudden spate of work, *The Sword of Song* (more correctly, *The Sword of Song Called by Christians The Book of the Beast*)

was the most interesting. Magnificently produced in Paris in a limited edition of five hundred, with a design incorporating '666' on the cover, it is to this day regarded as an example of early twentieth century printing at its finest and is one of Crowley's most sought-after books. Yet when it was published, despite G.K. Chesterton praising it in a substantial review in the *Daily News*, under the title 'Mr Crowley and the Creeds', few read it: as a limited edition, there were simply too few copies available.

This was a shame. The book was Crowley's best to date. The poetry was mature, eccentric, sardonic and captivating. The footnotes were deliberately and characteristically provoking: 'Eton – A school noted for its breed of cads . . .' and 'Christ Ascends – And I tell you frankly that if he does not come back by the time I have finished reading these proofs, I shall give him up'. Upon its publication, Crowley sent a copy of the book to everyone mentioned in it (not, one assumes, Christ, although Crowley would have sent him one if he could) with a covering *pro forma* letter which read:

Letters and Telegrams BOLESKINE FOYERS is sufficient address.
Bills, Writs, Summonses etc · CAMP XI, THE BALTORO GLACIER, BALTISTAN.

O Millionaire!
Mr. Editor!
Dear Mrs. Eddy,
Your Holiness the Pope!
Your Imperial Majesty!
Your Majesty!
Your Royal Highness!
Dear Miss Corelli,
Your Serene Highness!
My lord Cardinal,
My lord Archbishop,
My lord Duke,
My lord Marquis,
My lord Viscount,
My lord Earl,
My lord,
My lord Bishop,
Reverend Sir,
Sir,
Fellow,
Dog!
Mr. Congressman,
Mr. Senator,
Mr. President,

(or the feminine of any of these), as shown by underlining it,
Courtesy demands, in view of the

(a) tribute to your genius
(b) attack on your (1) political
(2) moral
(3) social
(4) mental
(5) physical character
(c) homage to your grandeur
(d) reference to your conduct
(e) appeal to your better feelings

on page of my masterpiece, 'The Sword of Song,' that I should send you a copy, as I do herewith, to give you an opportunity of defending yourself against my monstrous assertions thanking me for the advertisement, or – in short, replying as may best seem to you to suit the case.

Your humble, obedient servant,

ALEISTER CROWLEY.

Crowley's vicious wit was at full stretch: Mrs Eddy was Mary Baker Eddy, the founder of the Christian Science Church, while Miss Corelli was a famous novelist noted for her moralistic stories and affected style. She was Queen Victoria's favourite author.

Not all the critics shared Chesterton's admiration. The *Literary Guide* hailed it as a masterpiece of learning and satire but the *Yorkshire Post* noted that it was 'distinctly, though quite needlessly, calculated to irritate not only the Christians to whom it is directly addressed, but even every serious-minded man of any religion whatsoever.' Crowley must have been pleased.

Next came *Why Jesus Wept*, which Crowley dedicated in part to Christ, Chesterton and Rose's foetus, in another limited edition of a hundred copies. It was a satirical play about English society, the germ of the idea starting with the brassy mother and daughter in the Galle Face Hotel in Colombo. Now being in charge of promoting his books, Crowley prepared several fliers. They were another chance for him to exercise his sense of humour. In part, one flier read:

Unique opportunity – Order early to avoid Armageddon! Why Jesus

Wept by ALEISTER CROWLEY (who weeps too) A study of Society and of the Grace of God Limited edition at £1.1.0 uniform with the 'Sword of Song,' but in black throughout Are you a young and tender-hearted maiden? W J W will delight you and fill you with beautiful thought Are you a devout Mystic? In W J W is the key to Beatitude Are you a bustling business man? W J W will tone up your harried nervous system Are you a poet? W J W will not cut your hair but it will raise it Are you a dog-fancier? You will never beat the breed of bitches in W J W Are you a theologian? W J W proves that Christ was no lachrymose hysterical hypochondriac, but a man with a genuine grievance [It ended:] *The Milwaukee Christian Science Tomahawk says 'Now we know why.' The Catholic Press is unanimous in its favour The Society Snippet says 'we recognise under the smiling mask of Angela the sinister and berouged features of Lady S ' God's Grace; with which is incorporated Ghostly Goings-on, a paper for Godly Gaffers says: 'The Blessed Blood again blots out Beelzebub's blasted blow-fly-blears I say Buy! Buy Now! Quick! Quick! My Unborn Child screams 'Buy!'*

As if this was not enough to shock, Crowley included a letter from his mother in the book which pleaded with him to 'turn from the arch enemy of your soul.' Another flier advertised this inclusion: 'With the specially contributed Appeal from the Poet's Mamma.' A footnote added, 'Look slippy, boys! Christ may come at any moment. He won't like it if you haven't read the book about His melt.'

What the press made of Crowley's sudden literary outpourings was mixed but, generally, the critical response was one of amusement and admiration tempered with a puzzlement that his standards could be so uneven. In short, he needed an editor.

Ivor Back was, to some extent, appointed to the post. He was charged with compiling Crowley's collected works which, although he was only thirty, were sufficient to fill three volumes published one per annum from 1905. The last volume contained a competent bibliography compiled by Duncombe Jewell but only

covering books to 1905 and omitting any mention of *White Stains*. When the first volume of the collected works appeared, Crowley offered a prize of £100 for a critical essay on his writings. It was to be some time before anyone came forward to claim it.

How much Crowley spent on publishing up until 1905 is incalculable but it made heavy inroads into his fortune: it also left him with extensive paper assets – the books – which he had no chance of ever realising into cash. For many years, he tried to pay off debts with books. His creditors usually refused such settlement. The books are now worth many times their original cost.

As if promoting his own name were not enough, Crowley also published anonymously or pseudonymously. One such title was *Alexandra a Birthday Ode*, beneath the title of which was added 'annotated fragments of an Ode to England's Queen. Privately issued to Persons of Quality. Five Dollars.' Purportedly published in Shanghai and written by 'Ophelia Cox (née Mrs Hunt)', a double-entendre Crowley had used before, it appeared in 1906 and was wisely printed in Paris: the contents were obscene It is believed the copies Crowley tried to import into Britain were confiscated by Customs.

Publishing aside, Crowley resumed his magical work at Boleskine in the early summer of 1904. He believed he was under 'magical attack' from Mathers, whom he assumed to have been infuriated by his deposing letter and thought was using Abramelin demons against him. This attack manifested itself in the death of several of Crowley's dogs – at this time, he kept a pack of bloodhounds in a row of kennels in front of the coach house – and the frequent illness of the servants. Calling on Beelzebub and his forty-nine servitors, Crowley counter-attacked, receiving help from Nimorup (an ugly dwarf), Nominion (a jellyfish-like spirit) and Holastri (a huge pink insect) along with other occult forces. Additionally, a workman installing the heating system lost his mind and physically attacked Rose: Crowley saw this as Mathers' work, too. Rushing to Rose's aid, Crowley speared the man with a salmon gaff and he and Back manhandled him into a room,

locking him up until the police arrived. No charges were laid. Shortly afterwards, Crowley found a large stag beetle in the bathroom. Over the next week or so, hundreds appeared all over the Boleskine property. Crowley sent one to the Natural History Museum in London but they were apparently unable to classify it. Crowley considered the beetles further proof of the power of the magic in which he was involved.

In a rather desultory fashion, Crowley and Rose tried to raise Aiwass and made the perfume and Cakes of Light for which Crowley had received instructions in *The Book of the Law*. A sort of biscuit, these Cakes were used as a form of magical eucharist or host. The recipe for them, as given by Aiwass, included ideally menstrual blood or, failing that, the blood of a child or of a priest or one of his congregation or, lastly, of an animal. Crowley made his cakes out of coarse flour, honey, wine and a chicken's blood.

On 28 July 1904, Bott delivered Rose of a daughter. According to local gossip, amplified in the years ahead, Crowley spent Rose's labour magically trying to have her give birth to a monster: in the early months of her pregnancy he had (allegedly) hung her bedroom with black curtains and carried out rituals to have her provide him with a remarkable offspring. The latter may have been fact: Crowley believed he could influence the soul of the foetus, his thinking years ahead of the concept that a child's personality might be affected by it hearing sounds while in the womb.

Whatever he did, he failed. The infant was ordinary in every way except its names. Crowley and Rose called their first-born Nuit Ma Ahathoor Hecate Sappho Jezebel Lilith. Respectively, these referred to the Egyptian goddesses of the sky, truth and justice, and love and beauty, followed by Hecate as a sop to the infernal gods, Sappho in honour of the muse, Jezebel because she was Crowley's favourite biblical character and, finally, Lilith, the lustful, child-devouring female vampire demon of Jewish mythology derived from the Assyrian storm demon Lilitu. Fortunately for the child, she was to be called Lilith. In the naming of his children, Crowley was well ahead

of his time: it was to be the 1960s before rock stars and hippies began to give their offspring unusual names.

For Rose, the birth was a climax after which life was a hiatus. She was not a reader, was neither musical nor artistic and was, according to her husband, even unable to play cards, beyond the simplest game. To entertain her and lift her spirits, Crowley decided to write a book for her, preferably one in a genre she would (as he put it) understand: by this, he meant pornographic. He also hoped it might turn her mind back to sex after their period of prenatal celibacy. Writing a chapter a day, Crowley read them aloud in the evenings to his wife and house guests, after his aunt had retired. Once the book was well advanced, Crowley, with Back and Kelly, decided to collect together Crowley's erotic verse, with some prose, and publish it. The resulting book was ironically entitled *Snowdrops from a Curate's Garden*.

In the style of Victorian erotica, it starts with a biography of the author, K, whose manuscript was stolen by the editor. K, it claims, 'was born about the year 1860 in a hunting shire of England. His parents were of the lesser class of country magnate which does not care to make any great show. They had enough self-respect to live the life of their choice.' Such could be the description of Edward and Emily Crowley. K goes on to take holy orders, is appointed to a well-paid chaplaincy in Paris, composes a volume of hymns but spends his spare time hanging out with intellectuals in a restaurant, Au Chien Rouge. He loses his virginity to the 'boat-captain on a Seine steamer', marries a young and beautiful English girl, and they honeymoon in Cairo, where they visit 'the infamous T... Club, where the dissolute officers of the Army of Occupation, merchants, fish porters, pimps, all the cream of Egyptian society gathered every Wednesday night to commit appalling orgies.' Just as in Victorian pornography, K watches his wife being gang-banged. Following the biography comes the text, the 'snowdrops' of the title. These include a de Sade-like novella about an archbishop and a body of obscene poems and parodies among which is 'Rosa Mystica', an ode about Rose.

As autumn approached, the house parties ceased and Crowley determined to winter in St Moritz. Boleskine could be very bleak between October and March. In October, he crossed to France; Rose, after dropping off the baby and a nanny with her parents, joined him the following month. Taking rooms in the Hotel Kulm under the names of Lord and Lady Lockey, they spent the winter skiing and skating and, much to Rose's delight, mixing with resort society. Crowley also went on a sled down the Cresta Run, afterwards making some suggestions to improve safety. They were not taken up. Crowley gleefully recorded in his autobiography that a number of sledders were killed because he was ignored.

During their stay, Crowley met an eighteen-year old Englishman called Clifford Bax, who later wrote at length of Crowley in his volumes of memoirs, giving the best descriptions of him at this stage in his life:

> *A powerful man with black magnetic eyes, walked up to me He wore a velvet coat with ermine lapels, a coloured waistcoat, silk knee breeches and black silk stockings He smoked a colossal meerschaum 'My name,' he said, 'is Aleister Crowley I am a poet and magician . ' Every evening we played chess together and to play chess with a man is to realise the voltage of his intellect A strong and imaginative mind directed the pieces that opposed me Moreover, he was an expert skater, an expert mountaineer and in conversation he exhibited a wide knowledge of literature, of occultism, and of Oriental peoples. I am certain too, that with a part of his personality he did believe in his Messianic mission On the eve of my return to England, after we had played the last of our chess games he exhorted me to devote myself to the study and practice of magic I understood that he would instruct me. 'Most good of you,' I stammered, 'but really, you know – perhaps I am not quite ready I must read a little more first ' 'Reading,' he answered, is for infants. Men must experiment Seize what the gods have offered. Reject me, and you will become indistinguishable from all these idiots around us ' He paused, and then asked abruptly, 'What is the date?' 'January 23rd,' I answered. 'What is the year, according to the Christian calendar?'*

'Nineteen hundred and five' 'Exactly,' said Crowley, 'and in a thousand years from this moment, the world will be sitting in the sunset of Crowleyanity.'

If Bax is right, Crowley made a telling slip of the tongue here: he must have meant 'sunshine' rather than 'sunset' for he believed his religion would (like Christianity) last two millennia. On the other hand, Bax's memory might be at fault: Crowleyanity was not likely to have been a phrase Crowley had yet used and *The Book of the Law* had yet to impact itself upon Crowley – or perhaps it already had.

In the spring of 1905, the Crowleys returned to Britain and visited Rose's parents, who were living in Bournemouth. Rose experienced a false pregnancy and went to a back-street abortionist who gave her a heavy dose of ergot of rye, a poison known to cause miscarriages. Nothing, of course, happened. Rose had the dose doubled. As she was suffering now from acute toxicosis, Crowley rushed her up to London where Bott and Back attended her.

The alarm over, they travelled home to Boleskine and took up where they had left off the previous autumn. Visitors began to descend on them – Gerald Kelly, Rose's mother, Ivor Back, Oscar Eckenstein and 'an eminent masochist named Colonel Gormley, R.A.M.C. (dead previously, then and since)' whom Crowley found excruciatingly boring and humourless. Gormley, a former military doctor who had served in both the Far East and South Africa and who declared he had been flagellated by over two thousand women, was someone Rose had known before her first marriage. He had pursued her ever since.

Crowley settled to the nearest he was ever likely to have to a normal family life. He wrote poetry and attended to his publishing activities, climbed and fished and played the role of a father. He lived well. Wine was purchased from the best London and Edinburgh vintners, his clothes were made by the best London tailors. He was an acknowledged poet, thanks to Chesterton, and magician. The future looked full of promise.

With his house guests, Crowley perpetrated more pranks

and jokes. He erected a sign in a field below Boleskine reading 'This way to the Kooloomooloomavlock (does not bite)'. Apparently, the animal (which was invisible) terrorised the area around Foyers where there was already the long-established myth of the Loch Ness monster. Crowley claims that the owner of the hotel in Foyers later tried to stalk and shoot it. He also put up notices stating 'Beware of the Ichthyosaurus' and 'The Dinotheriums are out today'. To the unsophisticated, devoutly religious locals, this behaviour smacked of both eccentricity and danger, which opinion was compounded by another trick Crowley played upon them with the help of several guests. Wherever he went on his foreign travels, Crowley purchased exotic animal pelts to strew about Boleskine. One Sunday, draping themselves in skins, he and his friends lay in wait in bushes along the lane to the kirk in Foyers. As the God-fearing locals approached, Crowley and company leapt out on them, sending them running for their lives in fright. Needless to say, these antics did not endear him to the locals and only served to worsen his reputation.

Perhaps the funniest jape of all was played upon a fellow guest. On 27 April, Guillarmod came to stay. He was anxious to stalk a stag and shoot grouse but had not realised that there was a closed season for hunting. Crowley saw the opportunity for a prank. When Guillarmod asked, in all innocence, what a haggis was, Crowley replied that it was a rarely seen, ferocious wild sheep, formerly domesticated but gone feral after the '45 Rebellion, and considered to be very dangerous. Crowley then purchased an old ram from a local farmer and had it placed up on Gleann Liath, kept there with a plentiful supply of food. Two days later, Crowley arranged for his ghillie and piper, Hugh Gillies, to rush into the billiard room to report that there was a haggis on the hill above Boleskine.

Rushing to the gun cabinet, Crowley armed Guillarmod with a ten-bore shotgun loaded with steel-cored bullets: he himself took a .577 Double Express. Both guns could bring down an elephant. With that, Gillies, Rose, Ivor Back and Crowley took Guillarmod off to the hunt. First, they carefully weaved through an Italianate garden Crowley had laid out, detoured round the

tennis court and waded through the pond. This, Crowley said, would wash off any scent: as it was pelting with rain at the time, this seemed a weak excuse, but Guillarmod accepted it. After a very stiff climb up the mountainside behind Boleskine, they reached the glen, where they crawled about among the cover until Gillies 'found' the haggis. It was not fifty yards away. Guillarmod raised his gun and pulled both triggers. The slugs totally disintegrated the ram's hindquarters. The following day, the 'haggis' was cooked and piped into the dining room. Guillarmod sent the trophy head to a taxidermist for mounting.

There was, however, a more serious reason for Guillarmod to visit Boleskine. Crowley and he were making plans for another Himalayan expedition. Their target was to be Kanchenjunga, the third-highest mountain in the world.

9

The Five Treasures of the Snow

With plans well advanced, Crowley asked Guy Knowles and Oscar Eckenstein if they would contemplate joining his expedition to Kanchenjunga, but they declined. Knowles decided that one expedition with Crowley was enough and Eckenstein was reluctant to serve under Crowley as leader, telling Kelly that he doubted his judgment and considered the risks too great. Crowley, he thought, was too much of an individual. Eckenstein also refused to take part in anything involving Guillarmod, whom he disliked and considered too inexperienced for such a climb, advising Crowley to have nothing to do with him.

Kanchenjunga was quite a challenge. At 28,208 feet, just 42 feet shorter than K2, it stood on the Sikkim/Nepalese border. Consisting of five peaks, it had been studied but no serious attempt had been made on it. In 1883, the mountaineer W.W. Graham had climbed in the area and, in 1899, an expedition led by Douglas Freshfield and Vittorio Sella had surveyed and photographed it. One of their party, a cartographer called Professor E. Garwood, had done his best to map it. Apart from these, few Europeans had even seen the mountain.

Once plans began to firm up, Crowley turned his attention to Sella's photographs and Garwood's maps. The former were spectacular. The latter, Crowley was to declare, were very inaccurate, although the internationally famous mountaineer F.S. Smythe, who attempted the climb in 1930, was of a different opinion and found them extraordinarily accurate considering the problems Garwood had faced drawing them. However, in correcting the proofs of his autobiography many years later,

Crowley, perhaps on reflection, was to soften his criticism and changed the sentence 'All I can say is that Professor Garwood's map is seriously wrong in many important points' to 'some important points.' This alteration with others has never been published.

Eckenstein grew concerned about how matters were progressing and told Crowley he thought the whole expedition was foolish in the extreme. The mountain was a harder climb than K2. Guillarmod was not up to it. In his opinion, the entire plan was a recipe for disaster. Crowley, typically, shrugged off his friend's concerns.

Crowley was desperate to attempt Kanchenjunga. He wanted an altitude record. Just as he thought he was becoming an acknowledged poet, so did he keenly wish to be recognised as a mountaineer. To achieve this, he seemed prepared to pay any price and ignore any warnings or disadvantages. He even conveniently forgot lessons previously learned. That Guillarmod had behaved so atrociously on K2, leaving the porter in the crevasse on the Baltoro Glacier, which had so disgusted Crowley, was now overlooked. In his autobiography, Crowley states that he had 'a fatal weakness for believing the best about everybody. In face of the plainest evidence, I cannot believe in the existence of dishonesty and malice, and I always try to build with rotten material.' With hindsight, Crowley was to admit that his one big mistake was teaming up with Guillarmod and, in his autobiography, he persistently referred to him as Tartarin, after Tartarin de Tarascon, the fictional comic creation of Alphonse Daudet and hero of, pertinently, a book called *Tartarin sur les Alpes*. Tartarin (the word means a braggart in French) was somewhat lacking as a climber. The truth, however, was that while Crowley may have been a poor judge of character, he was not going to let anything get in the way of his arrogance and overriding ambition.

Preparations were hurried along. Guillarmod returned to Switzerland to buy equipment and recruit at least two – preferably three – other team members. Crowley was tasked with going to India to make advance arrangements. Before

he left, he saw fit to write down how he wished to be buried:

> *In case of my death, George Cecil Jones will carry out these instructions Embalm the body. Dress it in white Tau robe with Abra-Melin red and gold tunic and girdle, and the Crown and Wand Also the big red sword Bury all magical jewels with me. A pastos and vault to be prepared for coffin and tomb, in shape as taught, but without any figuring. Use white stone On the pastos write only Perdurabo Let the vault be bricked up and concealed utterly from human sight nor let any memorial of its place be kept In the vault place vellum editions of all my works, hermetically sealed. The place shall be chosen by and known to George Cecil Jones alone. It shall be in ground consecrated by him.*

Leaving Boleskine on 6 May with all his personal mountaineering equipment, Crowley embarked six days later upon the P&O passenger liner *Marmora*. He broke his voyage in Cairo, arriving in Bombay on 9 June. Travelling overland by train to Calcutta, he briefly visited Edward Thornton before heading north to Darjeeling. The journey thrilled him, and he described it in his autobiography with all the panache of an experienced travel writer.

The journey began, he wrote,

> *jogging dully across the acrid plains of Bengal and then at Sara Ghat one finds oneself suddenly on the bank of the Ganges I had seen the river before, higher up, and it is not particularly exciting, but here it flowed gigantically across a vast desolation. The time was sunset, the turbid water glowed with angry reds and oranges There was an evil coppery sheen upon its waveless turmoil. Its breadth possessed a horror of its own; it was like a river of hell Far away it reached to the right and left. There was nothing to break the horizon It gave the desolate effect of ocean, but the boundlessness of the open sea suggests liberty This river had told of barrenness and bitter bondage The windless Ganges stank of putrefaction It was not even the stench of rotting vegetation It seemed as if it were the earth itself which*

was decaying. A more fantastic and more frightful sight I have never seen.

Crossing by steamer, during which an execrable dinner was served, the journey continued by train on the far bank. Finally,

reaching the foot of the hills, one transfers to a toy railway, which climbs the six thousand odd feet to Darjeeling by means of complicated curves and even loops. One ascends rapidly: the view constantly changes, one begins to appreciate the geology of the country as a whole. In the foreground the tropical vegetation is superbly thick and rich. One is so relieved by the change to cool shade and a suggestion of moisture that it comes as a shock to remember that this is the Terai, one of the most deadly fever districts in the world. By lunchtime the character of the vegetation is already markedly altered. The heavy tangle of the low country begins to give place to mountain sprightliness, but also the view tends to disappear altogether. One enters the region of almost eternal mist. The day is warm, and yet one is chilled to the bone. One is glad to come out on to an exposed ridge at Ghum and find the train begins to go down hill. It was the sign of the nearness of Darjeeling.

Drawing near to his destination, he caught his first glimpse of the mountain he was hoping to conquer, 'faint rose, faint blue, clear white, in the dawn.'

Darjeeling itself did not impress Crowley. The coolies were capable of carrying massive loads – a young woman carried his huge steamer trunk on her back from the train station to the Woodlands Hotel where he had a reservation – but little else pleased him. The town was hung with the smell of mildew: anything of leather left out overnight gathered a haze of green by morning. Many of the residents were, in Crowley's eyes, 'the unmarriageable shabby-genteel.' The place was 'lousy with young ladies whose only idea of getting a husband is to practise the piano. In such a climate it is of course impossible to keep a piano in tune for five minutes, even if one could get it into that condition.' His hotel was poor, the food 'as mildewed as the

maidens.' The misty air, mixed with wood smoke, gave Crowley a sore throat, the dampness rheumatism. Local officials, however, were keen to help him. He attended a freemasonic installation ceremony and, through the lodge, met everyone of importance and use to him.

Major White, the government transport officer, arranged for 8,000 pounds of supplies to be carried to the foot of the Yalung Glacier, but a percentage of this was pilfered *en route*: the Baltis, Crowley remarked, were not as trustworthy and loyal as the Kashmiris he had used on K2, as many of whom as he could contact he employed to come to Nepal for this new expedition.

Moving from the Woodlands to the Drum Druid Hotel, Crowley met the manager, an Italian called Alcesti C. Rigo de Righi, who offered to act as transport overseer for the expedition. Crowley agreed. De Righi could speak Nepali, Hindustani and Tibetan, but he had never climbed. Both men were to regret it.

For the first three weeks of Crowley's stay in Darjeeling, the town was in the mist. It rained on and off the whole time. Then, on 9 July, the weather cleared and Crowley studied Kanchenjunga with binoculars, coming to the conclusion that the peak would be 'easy to reach from the col to the west of it, and there could be no doubt that it was an easy walk up to that col.' Nothing could have been farther from the truth. Four days later, he went back to Calcutta to purchase stores Guillarmod had overlooked out of (Crowley thought) parsimony. While in Calcutta, Crowley received a cable from Guillarmod: he and the others had been shipwrecked in the Red Sea.

Eventually, the rest of the expedition reached Darjeeling on 31 July. Guillarmod brought with him just two others. The first, Alexis Pache, was a thirty-one-year-old Swiss cavalry lieutenant; the second, also a Swiss army officer, was Charles Reymond. Both were experienced alpine climbers. Crowley found Reymond dour yet commonsensical. To Pache, he took an instant liking.

As on the K2 expedition, Crowley had drawn up a contract

in French to which they all agreed. The Swiss contributed 15,000 Swiss francs: Crowley contributed 5,000 Swiss francs. Clearly, to climb with Crowley was seen, by him at least, as an honour worth the price. Crowley's leadership was covered by a clause which stated categorically that he was the arbiter of all matters mountaineering and had to be obeyed. They were also not to have anything to do with women. On 4 August, they all signed it, including de Righi.

Permission to enter Nepal from India, the border of which Kanchenjunga straddled, was some time in coming. Crowley, bored with Darjeeling, turned his hand to journalism, writing two pieces about the K2 expedition for the *Pioneer Mail* in Allahabad. Ever the controversialist, in the first article Crowley criticised alpine guides, accusing them of being 'incompetent and too often cowardly and drunken peasants.' This drew a sharp retort from a Mr Sullivan of Lucknow, who defended them as 'a plucky, sober and intelligent set of men.' The second article hit out at the Alpine Club and resulted in a stinging rebuke in the 5 August edition of the paper. Written anonymously, it contained a prophetic statement: 'The sport of mountaineering will certainly suffer no loss if Kangchenjunga permanently effaces this polished individual.'

At sixteen minutes past ten on the morning of 8 August, in pouring rain, the party set off from Darjeeling. Crowley was tugging at the rein to go and they left without ratification of their Nepalese entry permit but, at the border village of Kang La (today Garakhet), permission was granted. The expedition was large. Apart from Crowley and his colleagues, there were three Kashmiris who had been on the K2 expedition, including Salama Tantra, a sirdar (overseer of labour), six servants and seventy-nine porters. They carried over seven tons of supplies and equipment.

Although Kanchenjunga is less than fifty miles from Darjeeling, the Himalayan foothills between the town and the mountain are steep and run in ridge after ridge. To cover the distance, the expedition had to travel over two hundred miles. At first, the going was easy. For the first 156 miles to a village called Chabanjong, the road was good and they stayed overnight in

dak bungalows. Beyond Chabanjong, they had to make their way through heavy rhododendron forest. It rained almost continuously and the bushes were alive with leeches waiting to attach themselves to any passing animal. Some, Crowley recorded, were seven inches long and, when gorged with blood, could weigh nearly two pounds. To pull them off was inadvisable: the wound would quickly fester. The only way to remove them was with a lighted cigarette or flame. Yet smoking was impossible for everything was perpetually damp. Even their waterproofs were inefficient and leaked through every opening.

By 21 August, they were at 15,000 feet, having gone along the Singalila Ridge to the Chumbab La Pass then up the Yalung Valley to the Yalung Glacier. From here, Crowley planned to ascend Kanchenjunga's south western face and, brimming with optimism, set off on a reconnaissance.

In his book *The Kangchenjunga Adventure*, Smythe was to warn that there was probably no mountain in the world where the mountaineer was exposed to greater danger. 'What appears to the naked eye as straggling thin white threads,' he wrote, 'are terrific ice-armoured couloirs, down which crash stones, and ice avalanches from disintegrating cliffs of rock and ice.' The expedition of which Smythe was a member dismissed the south west Yalung Glacier route without hesitation. It was obvious from afar that it was too dangerous. Yet Crowley had chosen it.

The south west face of Kanchenjunga is exceedingly steep and made up of a succession of granite precipices with a snow-covered shelf part of the way up, leading to a ridge which climbs to the third highest of the five peaks. It was this shelf, visible from Darjeeling, which made Crowley underestimate the climb. From the ridge, it is still a long way to the highest summit. Additionally, the shelf is highly dangerous because it is on the south-western - and therefore warmer – side of the mountain and subject to avalanches of rock, snow and ice. Crowley, striving ahead, either misread the mountain or deliberately decided to ignore the virtually insurmountable difficulties.

The mountain was not the only problem. The porters were

unreliable. A number deserted and Crowley's claim that he 'never had any trouble in all my wanderings with natives, servants, dogs and women' was soon proved wrong. Although he claimed to understand the natives, Crowley's view of them was patronal to the point of being colonial. It is true that he did not unduly overwork them, and he said he had their affection for they knew he would treat them fairly, yet he was addressed, at his own request, as Burra Sahib, the Great Master. As for understanding them, Crowley was well at sea. The desertions and other problems lay not so much in Crowley's treatment of the porters as in his ignorance of their culture. They were not afraid of Crowley, or the danger, but of the god who lived on the Five Treasures of the Snow, the translation of Kanchenjunga in the local languages. Climbing the mountain violated the god, who was believed to govern the lives of everyone living in the region. Of all people, Crowley should have understood this.

From here on, the expedition began inexorably to fall apart. Within three days of reaching the start of the ascent proper, a festering animosity between Crowley and Guillarmod erupted. Guillarmod accused Crowley of not putting out markers to demarcate the porters' route. Crowley accused Guillarmod of not camping at his designated sites. It is certain that Crowley was at fault: he was in too much of a hurry to adequately mark the route, causing Guillarmod to get lost and pitch camp where he could. Guillarmod then grew angry at Crowley's disregard for the porters' welfare. Many of them were climbing barefoot. Crowley claimed they had boots hidden in their packs and chose to go barefoot: this seems hardly likely. They were walking on ice. The coldness aside, their bare feet afforded them little purchase and they were forever slipping.

Next, Reymond broke the rules by veering off to find an easier route for his porters but failed, having instead to cut steps with his ice axe. Crowley went back to see what Reymond was up to and helped cut the steps, but was none too pleased at being disobeyed. When a number of porters came down with mountain sickness and snow blindness, Crowley was dismissive. Ever since the K2 climb, he had believed that there was no such thing as

altitude sickness, putting the symptoms down to exhaustion. Those who suffered from snow blindness, which Crowley said was merely a temporary reaction to the glare, were inadequately treated with eye drops of atropine. As if this were not enough, de Righi was out of his depth handling such a large body of porters. He had lost their respect and forfeited control of them to such an extent that Pache had to go down the mountain to take charge.

At one point, Guillarmod took his porters around the head of the glacier, instead of along Crowley's designated track. He was growing more despondent with every step. As Guillarmod climbed higher, glimpsing the mountain towering above him through the mist, he lost all hope of their route taking them to the summit and all confidence in Crowley. From Crowley's point of view, things were coming apart at the seams because the others refused to obey him.

At approximately 18,000 feet, they established Camp III, then pressed on to Camp IV at about 19,000 feet. Here, Reymond and Guillarmod collapsed from exhaustion, although Crowley said he felt 'as fresh as paint and as fit as a fiddle'. He put the others' condition down to physical and psychical trauma and heatstroke, although he admitted they were truly ill. Yet even he was having problems. The sunlight was so intense it made his exposed skin brittle and caused it to peel painfully.

The following day, Pache turned up with his porters. By this time, Guillarmod was in a foul temper, Reymond was beginning to flap and Crowley had fallen out with both of them. Recriminations flew and supplies started to dry up. With everyone save de Righi crowded into the camp, it was only hours before the paraffin ran out and food became short. Lower down the mountain, de Righi's porters were near mutiny. One of Pache's porters deserted, fell and was killed, taking Pache's pack with him.

Crowley ordered Guillarmod to take a few porters down to find the body and pack, and get the supplies flowing. On a rock outcrop 1,500 feet below, Guillarmod found the dead man. The

porters seemed not surprised at this first death: the mountain god had received its sacrifice and the body was buried. The dead porter's friend, however, became scared and deserted, dropping Pache's bed in the snow. The remainder of the porters were demoralised. Crowley took it upon himself to raise morale. In his novel *The Diary of a Drug Fiend*, published in 1922, he describes what he did: 'I was in command of a Himalayan expedition some years ago; and the coolies were afraid to traverse a snow slope which overhung a terrific cliff. I called on them to watch me, flung myself on the snow head first, swept down like a sack of oats, and sprang to my feet on the very edge of the precipice. There was a great gasp of awed amazement while I walked up to the men.'

On 29 August, Crowley, Pache and Reymond set out with a dozen porters, establishing Camp V at around 21,000 feet. It was a rash move. With supplies low, they were running a risk. It materialised. For two days, they waited for supplies that never came. Crowley dispatched Pache to Camp IV with a terse note. It accused de Righi of ineptitude and asked Guillarmod to come up as soon as possible. Yet, without waiting for a reply, he pressed on.

With several porters, Crowley struck out, cutting ice steps to enable the expedition to climb higher. If he wasn't going to conquer the mountain he was damned sure he was going to beat the K2 altitude record of 21,653 feet. The ice was friable in places and the party caused a small avalanche. One of the porters, terrified at being near the mountain god, became hysterical and disconnected his harness from the communal rope. To bring him to his senses, Crowley hit him with his ice axe. This further lowered morale and, back in Camp V, the porters started to grumble and grow afraid of the god. During the night, some absconded, reached Camp IV and complained to Guillarmod about being beaten. They proceeded to Camp III, where de Righi persuaded them to stay with the expedition, guaranteeing they would not be beaten again. He could not afford to lose more men on top of those who had already left.

The next day, 1 September, Guillarmod and de Righi, with

a large party of porters, arrived in Camp V, but without any supplies. They confronted Crowley, challenging his leadership and accusing him of a catalogue of crimes, including beating the porters. A shouting match developed. Crowley refuted the accusations.

With night approaching, they all faced a major problem. Camp V was too small to accommodate everyone. Furthermore, the snow was unstable and could not support their weight. Crowley ordered the porters to descend to Camp IV and shelter under rocks there. They did so. Guillarmod and de Righi, their leadership challenge coming to nothing, decided to return to Camp III and departed. Shortly afterwards, Pache expressed the desire to follow them: he had spent the nights since the loss of his bed sleeping on the ice floor of his tent and had had enough of this, the bickering and Crowley's despotism. Crowley did his best to dissuade him, but to no avail.

As the sun started to go down, Pache left Camp V. He was taking an uncalculated risk. After a day's sunshine, the snow was 'warm' and liable to shift. Thirty minutes later, Crowley and Reymond heard shouts which they assumed to be Guillarmod and de Righi. Reymond, against Crowley's advice, left to investigate. Darkness fell. Reymond neither called back nor returned. Incredibly, Crowley did nothing. He remained in his tent and, in due course, went to sleep. No doubt he was piqued at having had everyone disregard not only his orders but also his counsel.

When dawn broke, Crowley woke and went to see what had happened. A short distance below Camp V, a twenty-foot length of the path had been carried away in an avalanche that went down about 250 feet. He looked about but could see no one. What had happened was later recorded by Guillarmod in an essay entitled '*Au Kangchinjunga – Voyage et explorations dans l'Himalaya Voyage du Sikkim et du Nepal*', published in the journal *Echo des Alpes* in 1914.

After Guillarmod and de Righi left, Pache caught up with them. With three porters, they all roped together for the descent. Guillarmod led, then de Righi, followed by Pache

and the porters. The porter behind Pache lost his footing: the Europeans were wearing crampons but the natives lacked such climbing aids, although some had by now covered their bare feet with ordinary boots. He dragged the fifth man in the line down with him. Pache, despite his crampons, could not hold them and also fell. The last man in the line, the third porter, went too. They slid past Guillarmod and de Righi, causing the avalanche. They, too, were powerless and were also dragged down into it. Guillarmod fought to stay on the surface of the snow and ended up in a crevasse. De Righi was knocked unconscious on a ledge above him. Guillarmod dragged himself out of the crevasse on the rope to de Righi, revived the Italian and untangled him from the rope that had wrapped itself around him. Of the porters and Pache, there was no sign. They shouted for help. After a while, Reymond appeared and the three of them dug in the snow to find the missing men. After an hour, they gave up. No one could survive being buried in the avalanche for so long.

At first light, the survivors started the sad task of looking for the bodies. Not long after, they saw Crowley descending the mountain. How they could see him but he not see them is a puzzle. They called out to him yet he did not reply.

From here on, accounts vary wildly. According to Crowley, as he drew near to Camp IV he heard voices and replied to them but received no answer. Thinking he might be hallucinating, he carried on, collecting the porters who had sheltered there. At Camp III, he found only the porters and waited. In due course, Guillarmod and the others arrived. Luckily, they had suffered only superficial injuries. Although Crowley noted that de Righi was in some pain, he was scathing about his 'moaning and bellowing'. Now, apparently, Crowley ordered de Righi to send porters to Camp V to break camp, collect the equipment and bring down Salama Tantra and the others who were still there. De Righi could not persuade the porters to obey: Crowley did. He then allegedly had the corpses dug out of the snow and erected a memorial cairn on 3 September. After the funeral, Crowley washed his hands of the expedition. His colleagues

had broken their contract, disobeyed his orders, questioned his authority, been (in his view) reckless and unprofessional, and that was an end to it. Taking a few porters with him, he set off on the long hike to Darjeeling.

Their obligations over, Guillarmod, Reymond and de Right also started for Darjeeling. Guillarmod was seething. In his version of events, Crowley abandoned them. According to Guillarmod, the last he saw of Crowley before reaching Darjeeling was his passing the avalanche site, not even bothering to find out what had happened. He said he took no part in the recovery of the dead or the burial. The truth, as Guillarmod had it, was that the bodies were recovered on 4 September and the funeral held on 6 September, when the cairn was built.

When Crowley reached Darjeeling is uncertain, but what he did almost immediately is known. He telegraphed a biased report to the *Daily Mail* in London. This done, he started to write other articles blaming the accident on Guillarmod. When the rest of the expedition arrived in Darjeeling on 20 September, they were faced with a publicity *fait accompli*. If Guillarmod had been seething before he was now livid. He had thought Crowley would have suppressed the story. Instead, here it was, in print. And he was being held responsible. There is even reason to believe that Crowley wrote the first article in the tent at Camp V, just after Reymond had departed.

In the last of the articles, published in the *Pioneer Mail* on 15 September, Crowley defended his actions over the avalanche. He wrote:

> *But just a word of explanation by way of parenthesis as to why I did not go down at the time of the accident. I was in bed at the time of the first shout, making tea, after twelve hours without food in the snow, and it would have taken me ten minutes to dress. Reymond had his boots and patawe on, ready to start; I told him to call me if, when he found what was wrong, he needed any assistance. He did not call me. Nobody who was not there can judge of the circumstances, and I was the only person who was there who knew one end of a mountain from the other.*

He went on to say what he thought of the Drum Druid Hotel, where he had again taken rooms.

De Righi was given the right of reply. He pulled no punches, outlining all the problems they had had with their leader, ranging from his demanding expedition fees to his comment that de Righi was not exactly a gentleman like the rest of them but would prove useful in haggling wages and prices with porters and suppliers. He ended by remarking that if Crowley was an example of a gentleman, he was mightily glad he was not one.

Guillarmod and Crowley discussed the expedition on 26 September: the meeting was inconclusive, with Guillarmod asking Crowley not to write further to the press. Their meeting was little more than a delaying tactic for, the following day, Guillarmod wrote Crowley an ominous letter. It accused him of behaving shabbily and embezzling the expedition funds, demanded the repayment of money due to him – the balance of the expedition funds held in a Darjeeling bank – and made a veiled threat that if Crowley did not oblige he would send a copy of *Snowdrops from a Curate's Garden* somewhere Crowley would rather not see it go. As the book was scurrilously erotic, Guillarmod probably saw it as a lever in blackmailing Crowley. He should have known better: the advertisement would have been welcomed.

In the face of the cost of taking Crowley to court, Guillarmod backed down. Crowley decided not to press blackmailing or slander charges. It was a wise decision. Had he gone ahead, he would have risked letting too many worms out of the can. Instead, he stayed in the hotel with a young Nepalese girl called Tenguft for company.

Interestingly, as with his comments on Garwood's maps, Crowley was later momentarily inclined to admit to some of Guillarmod's criticisms. An annotation to the proofs of his autobiography reads: 'We must have Guillarmod's account ... it is only fair - completes the story.' However, the annotation is crossed out. Crowley thought the better of it.

Although Crowley regarded the deaths as regrettable, he did not really feel any remorse: he had long held the attitude that

once someone was dead that was an end of the matter. Finding their corpse was a waste of energy. His greater disappointment was that he had not conquered Kanchenjunga. He believed he had got up to 25,000 feet but this was wishful thinking and he probably reached no higher than 22,000. Writing to Eckenstein, he suggested they try again together the following year but nothing came of the proposal. Kanchenjunga was not finally scaled until 1955, when the expedition leader, Sir Charles Evans, decided not to set foot on the very summit out of respect for the local people's religion: ever since, other expeditions have followed suit. No one has yet set foot on the highest pinnacle.

Crowley's main criticism of Guillarmod was that he put too many people on one rope and had led rather than been at the back of the rope ready to act in case of a fall below him. It was, in Crowley's defence, a valid criticism and was to prove correct. On the 1922 assault of Everest, seven porters were placed on a rope. They were all killed in a fall.

As a result of the expedition, Crowley's reputation suffered. The February 1906 issue of the Alpine Club journal was quick to point out that Crowley was not one of their members. When the word spread that Crowley had not gone to the assistance of his fellow climbers, his standing among mountaineers plummeted. That he also wrote in one of his articles that he had not been 'over anxious in the circumstances to render help' because 'a mountain "accident" of this sort [meaning one occasioned by stupidity] is one of the things for which I have no sympathy whatever' hardly helped his case. Nor did another comment to the effect that Guillarmod was old enough to rescue himself and nobody would want to save de Righi.

There is an argument that what Crowley suffered in the tent that night at Camp V was nothing more than a blue funk. Forty years later, as he noted in *The Great Beast*, John Symonds watched as Crowley, with shaking hands, despairingly recorded his daily dose of the narcotic to which he had by then long been addicted. For this despair, Crowley had a description. It was 'Kangchenjunga phobia.'

10

Travels in Old Cathay

Leaving Darjeeling on 28 September for Calcutta, Crowley was in low spirits. For all his braggadocio about not caring about Pache's death, he felt it, if only because he knew it was going to scupper his mountaineering reputation. He had to find a new direction.

Arriving in Calcutta several days later, Crowley contacted Edward Thornton and checked into a hotel to await the arrival of Rose and the baby, for whom he had made arrangements to join him after the Kanchenjunga expedition. And he brooded. It was not the usual brash Crowley who wrote to Gerald Kelly, 'After five years of folly and weakness, miscalled politeness, tact, discretion, care for the feelings of others, I am weary of it. I say today: to hell with Christianity, Rationalism, Buddhism, all the lumber of the centuries. I bring you a positive and primaeval fact, Magic by name; and with this I will build me a new Heaven and a new Earth. I want none of your faint approval or faint dispraise; I want blasphemy, murder, rape, revolution, anything bad or good, but strong.'

After a week of moping, Crowley received an invitation that could not have been better timed. The Maharaja of Moharbhanj invited him to go hunting in his kingdom in Orissa, which covered forested hills rising to 5,000 feet and lowland on the western edge of the Ganges flood-plain. Crowley eagerly accepted, setting off on the 150-mile train journey to Balasore, where he was met and taken by road to Baripada.

Both the landscape and the people appealed to Crowley – especially the women. 'They are,' he noted, 'small and well

proportioned. Even when the women are mothers, they do not lose their form. The whole breast stands firm and points upwards.' By comparison, he concluded, 'the female breast of the European is a hideous deformity. Even in the case of the most beautiful woman, it breaks the line of the body, and it makes one think of a cow.' When he arrived at his destination, Crowley found the Maharaja a generous and amenable host and his mood lifted. He found a certain peace in the Maharaja's palace and hunting lodge, a quietude removed from the recent traumatic events.

As well as hunting with the royal party, Crowley went after bear and tiger with a forest officer named d'Elbroux, who had been hideously mauled by a bear. One night, they sat up in a *machan* over a salt lick, waiting for a large tiger known to visit the site. As darkness fell, the jungle came alive with insect noise and the sound of invisible animals moving in the cover. Distantly, a tiger called. Crowley's every nerve was taut. As the moon rose, the clearing around the salt lick was suddenly 'mysteriously peopled with gigantic shapes.' A herd of wild elephant had appeared. 'I sat up and spent the night watching the elephants as they went about their business. It was the most fascinating vision that has ever been vouchsafed to me on the material plane.'

The material plane was not Crowley's only current environment. During his wait for Rose, he meditated and set off travelling once more on the astral plane, keeping his magical hand in and establishing astral contact with Elaine Simpson in Hong Kong. They frequently visited each other astrally, Crowley recording that her astral body was five inches taller than her physical, 'self luminous and partially transparent so that I could see the background behind her, much as through a muslin curtain'. During one meeting, Crowley was surprised to see a Secret Chief, in the form of a golden hawk, in Elaine's company. At this, he realised that the Secret Chiefs wanted him to continue working for them, and he discussed this with Elaine, any doubts he expressed being erased by Aiwass's reassuring voice.

As if this were not enough, Crowley also wrote a number of

poems, rekindled his interest in Buddhism and hired a *munshi* to teach him Persian, as he hoped to return overland to Europe, via Tehran. He also embarked upon another pornographic work. It was an ingenious spoof made up of forty-two poems written in the form of *ghazals*, a Persian literary style. The *munshi* helped him get the structure right. Entitled *The Scented Garden of Abdullah the Satirist of Shiraz*, it drew part of its inspiration from Sir Richard Burton's translation of the fifteenth century *The Perfumed Garden*. Crowley's book was supposed to be the work of one Abdullah al Haji of Shiraz, translated by a fictitious Indian Army officer, Major Lutiy, who had been killed in the Boer War, his work posthumously edited and annotated by a Christian clergyman. Although it was obscene, Crowley declared it to be

> *a complete treatise on mysticism expressed in the symbolism prescribed by Persian piety. It describes the relations of God and man, explains how the latter falls from his essential innocence by allowing himself to be deceived by the illusion of matter. His religion ceases to be real and becomes formal, he falls into sin and suffers the penalty thereof. God prepares the pathway of regeneration and brings him through shame and sorrow to repentance, thus preparing the way for the divine which restores man to his original privileges, free will, immortality, the perception of truth and so on.*

The book was published by Probsthain & Company in 1910 and sold by private subscription only: had it gone on open sale, it would have been subjected to the obscenity laws. Crowley maintained that his 'forgery' was so good it fooled Persian scholars.

Some of the poetry contained in the book was homosexual. Much of it contained hidden cryptograms such as the names of Pollitt and Crowley. This was characteristic of Crowley's verse. He frequently 'hid' words often obscene ones, in a text otherwise construed as unpornographic. It was with the concept of the faking of spurious manuscripts and authors, part of Crowley the prankster's sense of fun.

On 25 October, Crowley had an experience that was no

quite so funny. As usual, he spent some of his time sexually exploring Calcutta. That evening, he went alone to a native red light district. The night was dark but there was a religious festival in full swing, the streets crowded and fireworks going off about him. As he made his way down the narrow streets, Crowley sensed that he was being followed. Suddenly, in an alley, he was surrounded by half a dozen men. One pinioned his arms while another began to go through his pockets. Another pulled a knife on him. Being an adventurer in the Burton mould, Crowley was carrying a .38 revolver in one of his pockets. He succeeded in getting it clear and, without taking aim, fired it in the general direction of his assailants. The gunshot was deafening in the narrow street. The attackers backed off, one of them screaming. The clamour attracted a crowd.

Crowley had, he later wrote, been working hard of late on his invisibility and had succeeded in reducing his corporeal presence to a faint flickering. Now, at the moment of danger, he achieved total invisibility and walked away without anyone seeing him. On reaching a nearby thoroughfare, he hailed a passing *gharry* and was taken to Thornton's house. His adrenaline was pumping and he was cock a hoop at his bravery. A number of Europeans had recently been mugged, but he had bettered the thugs, surviving unscathed but for the loss of four rupees, eight annas.

Thornton advised him to go to bed and see a lawyer in the morning. He did. The lawyer introduced him to a barrister who suggested he go to the police but warned that, in the light of the current pro-Bengali political situation, he might be charged with assault. When Rose landed on 29 October, Crowley greeted her with the disconcerting and melodramatic observation that she had arrived in time to see him hanged.

It was ascertained by Thornton that Crowley's bullet, fired at point blank range, had gone through one man's abdomen and stopped in another's spine. Both men had been hospitalised and confessed to the attempted mugging. The story reached the press and a reward was offered for the capture of the gunman, who was thought to be a sailor. The police were searching ships in the harbour and would soon, Thornton said, begin going

round the hotels. He recommended that Crowley get out of India at the first opportunity.

Pressed with the need to move on, Crowley posed Rose a question: which would she prefer to accompany him across, Persia or China? She chose China.

Employing a 'hideous, ill mannered and untrustworthy' Indian woman as an ayah (nurse) for the baby and retaining the services of Salama Tantra ('The one honest human being in the party. The loyal staunch old hound!'), who had not yet returned to Kashmir after the Kanchenjunga fiasco, the Crowleys caught the first available boat bound for Rangoon.

No sooner had they arrived in Burma than Crowley left his family at a hotel and went to stay for three days with Allan Bennett, who was currently living in a monastery on the outskirts of Rangoon. He was now even more revered than before, but his health was very poor and he was suffering from malnutrition as well as an assortment of tropical ailments. Crowley, who was in need of spiritual guidance and advice, asked Bennett how he could achieve Samadhi, the ultimate state of ecstasy reached through yoga. Bennett told Crowley he could not attain it unless his karma - his fate - was ready. Instead, he suggested Crowley concentrate upon readying his karma by seeking to obtain a magical memory which, in Buddhism, was referred to as Sammasati. It involved either training the memory through meditation to 'think backwards' and discover the purpose of one's life or studying the present to determine what had caused it to be as it was. In effect, Bennett was telling Crowley to become aware of his True Will, the backbone of *The Book of the Law*. When he left Bennett, Crowley was ready to follow his friend's recommendation.

In going to China, it was Crowley's ambition to penetrate Yunnan province, to the point where the Yangtze, Mekong and Salween rivers run parallel, within a very short distance of each other and through the Nu Shan mountain range. Yet there was more to it than that. Crowley, the failed mountaineer, was metamorphosing into Crowley the explorer.

I went toward China 'he wrote' *my veins bursting with some colossal bliss that I had never yet experienced I boiled with love for the unknown . . . Romance and adventure*

In going to China, Crowley was addressing that which underlay much of his life. He was going not just to explore but to experience, to address and conquer the restlessness in his soul, to momentarily fight off his despising of the banal, the mundane, the commonplace.

From Rangoon, the Crowleys travelled by river-boat up the Irrawaddy to Mandalay, where they arrived on 21 November, then went on to Bhamo, which they reached ten days later. Here they were delayed for over a fortnight waiting for immigration clearance into China. While there, Crowley took delight in harassing the somewhat lethargic – as Crowley considered him – assistant deputy commissioner, who was taking his time over their papers: the British administration in Burma was hoping that the delays would dissuade Crowley from proceeding further, especially as he was taking a wife and infant with him. It gave an opportunity for both the officious and the prank-playing Crowley to show. He also disliked the ADC, who was a Eurasian – 'I am not a snob or a puritan, but Eurasians do get on my nerves' – and wrote a letter to him which in part read, 'I must overwhelm myself in due expressions of gratitude for the untiring pains you have so willingly given yourself on my behalf, and trust that efforts so unintermitted have had no prejudicial effect upon your constitution. I am sure that you have thoroughly enjoyed yourself, virtue being its own reward, and I am sure I can express no more welcome good wish than that fate may soon send you another real white man to treat you as you have treated me . . .'

He signed it 'Saint E. A. Crowley.'

Protective bureaucracy was the least of Crowley's problems, however. They were travelling into a mountainous region that really was, and still is, the back of beyond. Maps, where they existed, were unreliable, and Europeans rarely ventured into this part of China. Even missionaries were thin on the ground. It is

certain that Rose had no idea of what lay ahead, and it was little short of gross irresponsibility on both their parts to take the baby on such a journey.

From Bhamo, they made for Tengyueh (today known as Dengyue), a British treaty port established just over the border in 1902, camping for three nights before crossing into China on the fourth day. Their departure was typically impetuous: Crowley wanted to press on, although he had still not received his passport back with the necessary permissions in it. Most of the way, Crowley rode a pony while Rose, the baby and part of Crowley's travelling library were carried in a sedan chair. They took the main route into China, but it was little more than a narrow mountain track. Crowley's pony fell off the track, plunging rider and mount down forty feet; a pack mule carrying their supplies and baggage kicked Crowley painfully on the thigh. Just before reaching Tengyueh, the ayah made off with one of the muleteers.

The British consul in Tengyueh, a man called Litton, had been aghast when he heard of Crowley's journey. He wrote to Crowley, 'I will say frankly that I had no idea that Mrs Crowley or a child would be with you, and that while there is really no reason why they should not go to Yunnanfu, along the main road, they will, I fear, suffer a good deal of discomfort and inconvenience on the road from the inquisitiveness and impertinence of the Chinamen which will try your temper. I would also recommend you dress in Chinese style, and if Mrs Crowley would not object to a Chinese lady's upper garment or jacket, she would attract much less attention and be less subject to annoyance.' Crowley interpreted Litton's attitude as characteristic of British parochialism but, on meeting him near the frontier, where he was arbitrating in a local dispute, he took an instant liking to a man whom he saw as a fellow adventurer. However, Crowley was something of a dilettante adventurer by comparison. Litton was the real thing, a genuine Sinologist and Sinophile who was married to a Chinese, spoke several dialects of Chinese, understood Chinese creeds and customs and had lived through the Boxer uprising. He had even Crowley claimed

discovered Boxer plans to besiege the Legation Quarter in Peking in 1900, but his warning had been ignored by his superiors: this is most likely an instance of Crowley exaggerating to improve on the story and, by association, make his own adventure all the more romantic.

In Tengyueh, the Crowleys were invited to stay with Litton's wife (and their five children) while Crowley's passport caught up with him, duly endorsed and containing an elaborate official Chinese entry visa. The treaty port consisted of little more than a small town and a number of foreign merchants, mostly British, who were involved in general mercantile activity and the jade trade, jade being extensively mined in the region. Crowley typically found them a mundane lot, but Litton's wife had another guest staying, a botanist called George Forrest, to whom Crowley also took a shine.

For twenty-five days, Crowley remained in Tengyueh, awaiting the issuance of his travelling papers and listening to some alarming news. Word arrived of rioting in Shanghai, with the killing of a number of foreigners. There was still an anti-foreign mood in China hanging over from the Boxer uprising of 1899/1900, and there were certain areas of the country where Europeans were at considerable risk. This did not bother Crowley. His mind was made up and he was going to travel across southern China, wife and infant in tow, regardless.

The danger they were all in came home to them on the night of 10 January 1906. A runner arrived during dinner to say that Litton had been taken ill. Crowley, Forrest and a Bengali doctor called Ram Lal Sircar set off on horseback to find him. It was a stormy night and they were obliged to dismount for most of the way. At first light, they met a party of Chinese carrying Litton's body on a litter. Crowley wanted to ascertain the cause of death: if by violence, they would need to investigate, but, worse, if by infectious disease, they had to act to contain it. According to Crowley the Bengali (whom he did not like because he was 'fat and oily, with small piglike treacherous

eyes') fled on seeing the body. Back at Tengyueh, Crowley forced the doctor to examine the body by striking him with his riding crop. The doctor, who later put in an official complaint that Crowley had assaulted him, examined the body and signed a death certificate to say that Litton had died of erysipelas, a non-contagious infectious skin disease also known as cellulitis. It was hardly likely to have been the cause of death although it could have caused complications through blood poisoning or meningitis. Litton's death was, therefore, marginally suspicious, but Crowley was satisfied.

With his travel documents finally in order, there was nothing to prevent Crowley moving on, although one of the stipulations of his permit was that he employ an interpreter. The man he chose was a mission-educated Chinese from Mandalay who called himself Johnny White but whose colloquial Chinese name, much to Crowley's amusement, was Ah Sin. His command of English was poor and he was, or so Crowley said, incapacitated most of the time by rice wine and opium, but he took him on nonetheless, even retaining him after he attempted to make off on Crowley's pony.

On 18 January, they left Tengyueh, crossing the Salween river near the modern settlement of Huirenqiao by a bridge surrounded by shrines dedicated to the river gods, arriving five days later at Yungchang (today called Baoshan). It was heavy going. Chinese silver coinage was in short supply and Crowley had to take copper cash in lieu: the amount he carried weighed well over forty kilos. As the late Litton had predicted, Crowley and his entourage drew considerable attention at every step.

In Yungchang, Crowley paid a courtesy visit to the local mandarin at his *yamen*, or official residence cum office, which he described as a 'perfumed paradise of beauty and pleasure, where every element of art and nature were harmoniously woven as if endeavouring to echo the melody of the personality of the mandarin.' He in response asked Crowley to attend a banquet which lasted twelve hours. The high quality and presentation of the food amazed Crowley, who, in anticipation of diners

comments half a century later when oriental food had become common in the West, noted that one 'can no more understand a Chinese dish in Europe than one can enjoy an Egyptian cigarette.'

Crowley had hoped to reprovision his expedition with fresh food at Yungchang but found that, while poultry and eggs were available, fresh milk was unobtainable – except, remarkably, evaporated milk in tins. Fortunately, Crowley was carrying a substantial supply of canned food purchased in Rangoon. Green tea, in the Yunnanese form of tea bricks, was plentiful, and Crowley bought supplies not only for consumption but also to take back to Britain, noting that it was a powerful laxative if drunk in a strong solution.

January 25 was Chinese New Year. Crowley revelled in the celebrations. 'Crackers clustered on long poles of bamboo and gay ornaments of coloured paper were the principal offerings to the eye, while the ear was delighted with all kinds of instrumental and vocal music. Strange delicate cakes and comfits tempted the tongue, while faint perfumes stirred the nostrils. The breeze was sweet with burning sandalwood and subtle with the sweat of dainty dancers.' The following day, they crossed the Mekong river near Yongping, at a point where the river ran through a gorge, the rocks covered in carved inscriptions, and took the route for Tali – now called Dali – at the southern end of Er Hai lake. The somewhat barren Nu Shan gave way to the forested Qingshuilang Shan mountains. At night, they camped.

It was on this section of the journey that Crowley came upon a child blind in one eye and noted in his diary, 'Saw child saved from missionary – one eye lost – showing marks of gouging.' In his autobiography, he extrapolated upon this comment: medical missionaries in remote districts, Crowley declared, tended to become sadistically insane from the boredom of their lives and, being brainless, could not endure it and took advantage of their circumstances to vivisect the poor. He was never to miss a chance to hit out at Christian priests. His accusation was complete fabrication, and blinding of children was a rumour put

about by anti-Christian Chinese and Crowley, having heard it, accepted it as true as it fitted his opinion.

After passing through a magnificent gorge and crossing a natural rock bridge, they arrived in Tali on 1 February, to be met by one of the ostensible eye-gougers, a missionary doctor called Clark. Crowley found him sincere but 'so cocksure that his own sect of Christianity held truth in utter purity and entirety that he could not imagine that the Chinese had any way of thinking at all. He regarded their refusal to follow him as a mixture of sheer dullness and sheer wickedness.'

Somewhere between Tengyueh and Tali, Crowley purchased an opium pipe and a small supply of opium and learned how to smoke it. Opium was common in the area, where it was cultivated and smoked by hill tribesmen. Once he met Clark, Crowley quizzed him about the effects of opium smoking. He had already taken opiates medicinally and experimented with it as laudanum in Kandy: in Burma, he had eaten powdered opium, but it had made him vomit. Smoking opium, he thought, was pointless. He smoked twenty-five pipes over five hours to no effect whatsoever. Then he discovered he had not been inhaling properly.

Clark lectured Crowley on the evils of addiction and the harm opium had done to China. Crowley dismissed his remarks and, visiting Clark's clinic, remarked upon seeing no victims of the drug. Indeed, throughout his trip Crowley noted that he saw no one who was positively the worse for opium. Rose's sedan chair coolies, he said, smoked opium and could still carry the heavy wooden chair with his wife and baby in it, travelling eight miles in two hours. Of course, Crowley chose to ignore the fact that opium was what killed their muscular pains and enabled them to achieve such a feat.

Crowley's attitude towards drug-taking in general and opium addiction in particular is not one for which he can be criticised. It was widely thought that opium was not unduly harmful and Clark's opinion was very much in the minority. When Crowley declared that he had studied drug-taking in detail and surmised that the 'philosophical phlegmatic temperament

of the Chinese finds opium sympathetic', he was merely echoing current thinking. Even his further statement, 'the effect of opium on a vivacious, nervous, mean, cowardly Frenchman, on an Englishman with his congenital guilty conscience or on an American with his passion for pushing everything to extremes is very different' would have been accepted: racial, even gender, groupings were thought to make one class of human more susceptible to the evils of opium than another.

It was 6 February when Crowley left Tali for the city of Yunnanfu (now Kunming). The countryside was at first mountainous, with wooded slopes and small lakes, but soon turned flat and, in Crowley's eyes, monotonous. The road, such as it was, was an improvement on those which the party had previously encountered. The China through which they now travelled had been little changed for a millennium. Women made their way to market on wheelbarrow-like push-carts; irrigation was achieved by foot-powered water wheels; the wheatfields were fallow and the rice paddies as yet unplanted; coolies carried goods on shoulder poles; the poor were dressed in rags while the wealthy rode in palanquins. The few places they passed through, like Chusung (Chuxioung), consisted of buildings with curved gables, Buddhist and Taoist temples emanating clouds of incense smoke, Muslim mosques and wayside stalls. At night, the party stopped in travellers' inns or camped in the countryside. After one night's camp, Crowley fell ill and remained so for three days, claiming that he therefore took little interest in his surroundings. So much for the inquisitive adventurer.

On 20 February, they arrived in Yunnanfu. W.H. Wilkinson, the British consul general, was forbidden to offer them lodgings: the Bengali doctor's complaint of assault had rendered Crowley temporarily *persona non grata*. Instead, the Crowleys stayed as guests of Dr Barbezieux at a French mission hospital. They remained in the town for ten days, Crowley purchasing a large number of old prints very cheaply, visiting a 'more bigoted and less intelligent' missionary than he thought possible, and touring

some of the city's more remarkable sights, few of which seem to have impressed themselves upon him. He makes no record of Yunnanfu save to remark upon its 'accumulation of centuries of indescribable dirt.' The ancient Yuantong Buddhist temple and the Tang Dynasty pagodas drew no mention in his autobiography, nor did the ancient pagodas at Tali and the surrounding mountain peaks, capped with snow: that he had passed through the most renowned jade mining area, the centre of a centuries-old trade, was also completely overlooked. He did mention shooting migrating birds, however. The sport was poor, the cranes tasted fishy but the geese were acceptable. Clearly, for all his interest in religion, mythology, magic and Buddhism, Crowley was not on a cultural journey of discovery and mind-expansion.

After reaching Yunnanfu, Crowley came up with the idea of sailing down the Yangtze river, a voyage of several thousands of miles and one of the great journeys of the world, even today. Yet he decided against it. The delays of British bureaucracy were blamed for throwing his schedule awry, and he said he had to return to England to plan his next run at Kanchenjunga in 1907. The fact is, Crowley was getting bored and restless. He had had enough of travelling over unmetalled roads and the sense of adventure was wearing thin. What had started out as a plan to traverse China fizzled out.

In bitterly cold weather, Crowley left Yunnanfu on 2 March, heading south for Tonkin, now northern Vietnam but at the time a French colony. As they departed, Wilkinson warned Crowley not to beat any of his coolies, for the consequences, in the light of current anti foreign sentiment, could be far-reaching: clearly, Crowley's reputation had preceded him. Crowley gave his word that he would exercise restraint.

The party made good time and reached the French concession settlement of Mengtse in eight days. Here they stayed for three days with the British Inspector of Chinese Customs, Brewitt Taylor, who found it hard to believe that the apparition before him was an Englishman. Crowley reported, 'the journey had reduced me to rags: I had no chance of washing or trimming

my beard; the skin of my face was torn by the wind.' No mention whatsoever is made of Rose and the baby's condition.

The next leg of the journey took them to the banks of the Yuan Jiang on the road between Pingbian and Manhao, where Crowley hired a boat to take them downriver to Hekou, on the border with Tonkin. That the river contained rapids did not deter him. Before setting off, Crowley decided to pay off the band of coolies who had carried all his belongings, not to mention his family, from Tengyueh. He also decided to have his revenge on them, for one of the coolies had, Crowley alleged, struck the baby.

With everyone loaded aboard the boat, Crowley paid the wages due to the head coolie but he deducted a percentage for unspecified 'fines'. The coolies were understandably furious. An ugly scene developed. Crowley removed his hunting rifle from its case, ordering Salama Tantra to wade ashore and cast off. The Indian was not a little reluctant, so Crowley told his 'loyal staunch old hound' to do as he was told or be the first one shot. Knowing his master, he obeyed, struggled back to the boat and, within a minute or two, they were all racing away on a fast current, to arrive in Hekou on 18 March, where Crowley and an English merchant he met got 'gloriously drunk celebrating the success of a journey which in the opinion of all reasonable people was a crazy escapade, doomed from the first to disaster . . . The awe inspiring adventure had proved as safe as a bus ride from the Bank to Battersea.'

That they avoided disaster was more providential than perspicacious. They had been travelling for four months in winter which, even in subtropical southern China, can be bitingly cold. Nothing of value had been stolen from them, they had not been attacked or threatened – the justifiably irate coolies aside – and the only illness suffered had been Crowley having an upset stomach, a slight fever experienced by Rose, and the baby catching a brief cold and having indigestion in Yunnanfu.

Although she was rarely mentioned during the trip, Rose was to elicit considerable praise from Crowley at the end. She had, he wrote, proved to be

an ideally perfect companion Since the nurse's elopement she had had no one to help her with the baby There was also a good deal for her to do in camp. We often travelled over twelve hours a day in really trying conditions; we encountered more than a little hardship what with fatigue, cold, lack of food and general discomfort, she never gave in, she never complained, she never failed to do more than her share of the work and she never made a mistake She was in a class by herself as a comrade Even Eckenstein was not so competent all round or so uniformly excellent. We had been over four months away from civilisation; and she had not only stood it but flourished exceedingly When we started, she had been rather empty-headed and frivolous, while physically, though healthy, she could not be called an athlete. At the end she had acquired the kind of soul that is evoked by intimate contact with naked nature Her figure was straight and supple, scorning corsets. Her limbs were lithe; her eyes bright and eager; her face aflame with the joy of perfect physical well-being and her heart exulting with the expectation of producing a new token of our tenderness before the end of the year.

He later added that she was 'a miracle of perfection as Poetic Ideal, Mistress, Wife, Mother, House-president, Nurse, Pal and Comrade.' Praise, indeed. He did, however, record that she did not appreciate, and probably could not intellectually understand, his magical activities, noting in his diary as they were bound for Yunnanfu: 'R, constant opponent of all my spiritual work. E.g. as soon as I turn my thoughts that way, she makes a row.' Quite possibly, she was not so much angry at his magic as at the fact that she was having to cope with a baby in the middle of China and thought he might care to postpone his mumbo-jumbo and give her some husbandly support.

From Hekou, they went by train to Hanoi then Haiphong, where they checked into the Hotel du Commerce. Crowley bought tickets upon a 'dirty tramp tub' loaded with livestock and bound for Hong Kong. The voyage was not pleasant. The sea was rough, the captain was a dipsomaniac the ship's engines broke down and she drifted into her first port of call at Houhai

on the Leizhou peninsula, Salama Tantra was racially abused, and the cargo of pigs and poultry stank.

After the rigours of the last months, Hong Kong was a haven of luxury. The Crowleys booked into the prestigious Hong Kong Hotel on the corner of Queen's Road and Des Voeux Road and made plans. Rose, it was decided, would return with the baby to England by way of Calcutta, where she would collect some baggage not taken through China. Salama Tantra would return with her to India. Crowley, meantime, would cross the Pacific to California and take the train overland to New York, where he hoped to raise money for another try at Kanchenjunga. He had the mountain, he considered, 'in my pocket. A party of average strength could make as certain of strolling to the top as if it were the Strand.' His recent failure and the momentary lapse of self confidence he had exhibited in his letter to Gerald Kelly were as nothing.

When Crowley left Hong Kong on 3 April, a passenger once more on the *Nippon Maru* bound for Shanghai, he had a secret agenda. Elaine Simpson was now living there. After months of meeting her astrally, he now wanted to see her in the flesh.

All across China, Crowley had been considering Bennett's advice on acquiring a magical memory. He had also been assessing his attitudes towards the various religious philosophies he was studying. All his reading drew him to the conclusion that every argument was endlessly cyclical. His entry in his magical diary, his record of magical rather than everyday events, for the previous 19 November indicates his confusion:

> *I realize in myself the perfect impossibility of reason; suffering great misery. I am as one who should have plumed himself for years upon the speed and strength of a favourite horse, only to find not only that its speed and strength were illusory but that it was not a real horse at all, but a clothes-horse. There being no way — no conceivable way — out of this awful trouble gives that hideous despair which is only tolerable because in the past it has ever been the Darkness of the Threshold. But this is far worse than ever before. I wish to go*

from A to B and I am not only a cripple, but there is no such thing as space. I have to keep an appointment at midnight, and not only is my watch stopped, but there is no such thing as time. But surely I am not a dead man at thirty!

He later summed up his confusion: 'In eighty days I went round the world of thought and, like Phineas Fogg and Omar Khayyam, came out by the same door as in I went. The solution must be practical, not theoretical; real not rational.'

In part, his confusion was the result of everything that had happened in his life since the failure to conquer Kanchenjunga. Not only had his self-confidence been dented but so had his philosophy. He was still worried about being chosen to represent the Secret Chiefs and concerned about both the meaning of his life and where his destiny might lie. The only anchor he had in this turbulent mental sea was Aiwass.

At about the same time as he purchased his opium pipe, on the road from Tali to Yunnanfu, Crowley reached a decision, possibly with the aid of the narcotic, certainly as a result of reading *De Mysteris* by Iamblichus, the third century neo-Platonic philosopher. He dubbed his current state of mind Augoeides, the Greek for the dawning. This he adapted into an invocation which he carried out in his mind several times a day, week after week, in the hope of achieving some enlightenment. When it came, it was in the form of a cathartic mental liberation. It was as if Crowley's personality had been refreshed anew. He wrote,

I found myself in the middle of China with a wife and child. I was no longer influenced by love for them, no longer interested in protecting them as I had been, but there was a man Aleister Crowley, husband and father, of a certain caste, of certain experience, of travel in remote parts of the world: and it was his business to give them his undivided love, care and protection. He could do this very much more efficiently than before when I was aware of what he was doing, and consequently inclined to overplay the part.

From now on, Crowley was to devote himself to the work

with which he had been charged, his existence split into two, the commonplace and the spiritual, which is to say, magical.

With his mind somewhat clearer, Crowley accepted his responsibility of spreading the word which had come to him from his Holy Guardian Angel and, through the latter half of his journey through China, he prepared to go on a magical retirement. At the same time, he readied himself once more to perform the Abramelin Operation.

There was another singular event which affected Crowley. When it happened is uncertain: it might have been towards the end of the Kanchenjunga expedition, just after he came down off the mountain, or on the trip across China. It consisted of a communication from the Secret Chiefs delivered by Salama Tantra. Central to this communication was a dream the Indian told Crowley he had had in which Crowley took a sword from a beautiful woman riding on a lake in a boat. This Crowley interpreted as Aiwass speaking through Salama, reconfirming him as the one chosen to do the Secret Chiefs' bidding.

In Shanghai, Crowley met Elaine Simpson and brought her up to date on everything that had happened to him. For the first time, he told her of his experiences in Cairo, of Aiwass and *The Book of the Law*. Elaine, who seems to have had her interest in such matters rekindled, expressed her conviction that it was all true, partly to Crowley's chagrin, as he was secretly hoping she would dismiss it and thereby release him from his belief in his responsibility. For twelve days, they talked and worked magic together, invoking and speaking with Aiwass, who told Crowley to return to Egypt but not to take Elaine Simpson, whom Aiwass referred to as Sister Fidelis. Aiwass's actual words as Crowley recorded them were, 'I do not like the relations between you; break them off! If not, you must follow other gods. Yet I would wish you to love physically, to make perfect the circle of your union. Fidelis will not do so, therefore she is useless. If she did, she would become useful.' This was convenient as Elaine was in love with her husband and Crowley was, in his own way, similarly attached to Rose.

Somewhat easier of mind, Crowley left Shanghai on 21 April

aboard the liner *Empress of India*, sailing to Vancouver by way of Japan. The voyage was unremarkable and Crowley spent much of his time in his cabin engaged on matters magical. Vancouver, when he got there, was unimpressive: the Rocky Mountains were shapeless; the food on the train was inedible; Canadians' manners were 'crude and offensive' and Toronto was 'a calculated crime both against the aspirations of the soul and the affectations of the heart.' While visiting Niagara, Crowley was mistaken by a gaggle of journalists for someone else, but enjoyed the vista and majesty of the falls. He then spent ten days in New York, wining and dining before sailing for Liverpool on the *Campania*. He seems to have done little about raising money for or interest in another mountaineering exploit. He reached English shores on 2 June, having passed much of the transatlantic voyage writing a poem called 'Rosa Coeli', the Rose of Heaven.

As soon as the ship docked, Crowley was handed two letters. They informed him that Nuit Ma Ahathoor Hecate Sappho Jezebel Lilith was dead. She had died of typhoid in Rangoon. Duncombe Jewell, who did not think much of Crowley as a father, sardonically declared that the child had died from 'acute nomenclature'.

In his diary, Crowley wrote, 'Arrived Liverpool. Heard of Baby's death by letters from Mother and Uncle Tom. Why did nobody cable me? Arrived London, perfectly stanned.' Later that day, he added, 'I am quite unable to think of the thing in detail or as a reality.' For all his detachment from death, his attitude that dying was little more than falling asleep, his stated intention no longer to be influenced by love for his family and his determination that, henceforth, he was devoting himself more to magic than anything else, the child's death did affect him. Three days later, his diary bleakly reports, 'Practically broke down playing billiards. Have drugged myself.' When, on 5 June, Crowley took the train to Plymouth to meet Rose who was arriving on the liner *Harpalyce* from Calcutta, he was still not much less than distraught: the following day his diary records, 'Still breaking down at intervals, and staggering from nervous weakness.' Admittedly, he was not remorseful at having left

Rose and the baby to go to Shanghai, but then he had no real reason to be, although it might be argued that a better and more considerate husband would have wanted to accompany his wife on the long homeward voyage. Yet both had been in fine fettle when he left them. It was just cruel fate.

In later life, when dictating his autobiography, Crowley laid the blame for the baby's death on Rose: she had 'neglected to cleanse the nipple of the feeding bottle, and therefore exposed the child to the germs of typhoid.' He went on to accuse her of drowning her sorrows in drink as the baby lay dying. Yet these remarks, expressed long after Rose and Crowley had parted, were made with hindsight. There is no way of telling whether he blamed her for the baby's death at the time.

There is, however, one truth to be gleaned from this. Rose was indeed developing into an alcoholic, and the baby's death and her husband's absence and obvious frequent unpredictability seem to have accelerated the process which had already been started before they met in Calcutta. It must be said, however, that there are signs in Crowley's letters to Gerald Kelly that, right from the day of her marriage, she had given indications of what might best be described as a mental instability. Furthermore, she was again pregnant, having conceived in China.

Part of Rose's slide into alcoholism may well have been due to her being married to a man like Crowley, who found it hard to show true affection. With a childhood such as he had experienced, this lack of an ability to love is hardly surprising. Crowley was later to put the fault for Rose's drinking squarely on her mother's shoulders. He intensely – and not surprisingly, considering his father-in-law's profession – disliked his parents-in-law: he wrote a piece in which he described his mother-in-law as a hag and her husband, the Rev. Kelly, as a baboon.

During the winter of 1906, Rose was to give birth to another daughter, whom they named Lola Zaza. According to Crowley, she possessed a Mongolian physiognomy. In his diary, he ominously wrote on 15 February 1907, 'Beginning of Baby's illness.' Lola Zaza had bronchitis and came close to death. A doctor attending the child ordered only one person to be in

attendance in the bedroom at any one time but, as Crowley put it, his mother-in-law disobeyed this instruction. The following day, his diary reads, 'Threw out B.K. [Blanche Kelly] and thus under Providence saved Baby's life.' He later elaborated, 'I made no bones about it; I took the hag by the shoulders and ran her out of the flat, assisting her down the stairs with my boot lest she should misinterpret my meaning.'

Despite all his travel and the excitements of the last two years, Crowley was – at least as a man – little changed, it seemed, from old. Yet, for the time being, his globetrotting was at an end. He was to base himself in Britain for the foreseeable future, and concentrate on the journey Aiwass and the Secret Chiefs were laying down for him.

11

Acolytes and the Equinox

For several months after his first daughter's death, Crowley was in ill health. Apart from a bout of recurrent malarial fever, he suffered from migraine headaches, neuralgia, a groin infection (quite possibly crabs caught from a lover) and a congested nasal duct and throat problems demanding surgery early in July. He was mentally and physically drained, blaming this on the Abramelin demons, which he believed he could have avoided had he obeyed the Secret Chiefs when in magical contact with them during his sojourn in Shanghai.

Nevertheless, he carried on his magical work in a nursing home and, upon leaving it in late July, at Cecil Jones' home, where he went to convalesce. Jones, whom Crowley considered one of his two magical and spiritual mentors – Bennett was the other – assisted him, and it was about now that Crowley dedicated himself to a life of magic and a pure and selfless existence. By this, he referred to his magical life, not his everyday one. Crowley was hardly going to change his temporal character. The actual oath he took he recorded in his magical diary: 'Frater P. [Perdurabo, i.e. Crowley] was crucified by Fra D.D.S. [Jones], and on that cross made to repeat this oath: "I P. . . . . , a member of the Body of Christ, do hereby solemnly obligate myself etc., to lead a pure and unselfish life, and will entirely devote myself so to raise etc. myself to the knowledge of my higher and Divine Genius that I shall be He."'

The inclusion of a Christian reference was not a little bizarre. Here was Crowley, an anti-Christian, taking an oath in which Christianity was a part of the binding clause. Such was the

paradox of Crowley: he criticised Christianity and yet he still paid it lip service, gave it credence. Perhaps he was afraid to fully relinquish it, just in case it was actually valid. After all, with his deep study into religions, it cannot have escaped him that even Christianity had a strong supernatural (or magical) tradition to it.

On 17 September 1906, Crowley took a suite in the Ashdown Park Hotel, Coulsdon, in Surrey. His health immediately improved. The 21st signalled the end of his thirty-two week-long preparation for the Abramelin Operation. He felt a weight lift from him at the achievement and, on 9 October, performed the ritual. 'I had no expectation, I think, of attaining any special success; but it came. I had performed the Operation of the Sacred Magick of Abra-Melin the Mage.' During it, he was convinced that his Holy Guardian Angel had entered him. In his diary, he wrote, 'I *did* get rid of everything but the Holy Exalted One, and must have held Him for a minute or two. I did. I am sure I did.' He thought he was possessed and said he had 'expected Rose [who was staying in the hotel with him] to see a halo round my head.'

Immediately following the Operation, he came down with an ulcerated throat which troubled him for some time, but he dismissed it as nothing. He was too preoccupied with the fact that he 'bore the stigmata of my Operation physically. I visibly radiated light. People used to turn in the street to look at me; they did not know what it was, but the impression must have been irresistible.'

Drugs were influential in the preparation for and conducting of the Abramelin Operation. Crowley's on-going experimentation with an assortment of drugs had by now changed into a systematic study and usage. In his autobiography, he admitted taking hashish after his return from China. Some of his experiments 'had been somewhat unexpectedly successful. I found my habit of analysing and controlling my mind enabled me to turn the effect of the drug to best account. Instead of getting intoxicated, I became quite abnormally able to push introspection to the limit.' His diary entry for 22 July reads, 'Remarkable experiment with hashish. I took some five grains, and smoked a little ganja [marijuana]. I was drinking a good deal of pott, too.' He gave a fraction of a grain on

a match to his nurse, but she remarked that it tasted like belladonna. On the day he finally performed the Abramelin Operation, Crowley noted in his diary, 'Many very strange illusions of sight, sense of proportion, locality, illusions of muscular distortion . . ' At the bottom of the page is an addendum: '. . . the hashish enthusiasm surged up against the ritual enthusiasm; so I hardly know which phenomena to attribute to which.'

He recorded his deliberations in an essay, *The Psychology of Hashish*, which was a seminal document on the subject until well into the 1960s. Crowley came to the conclusion that reactions to drugs were specific to the individual or the cultural grouping. For example, he noted how hashish drove Arabs to noisy partying and the Nizari Isma'ilis to murder – the word 'assassin' derives from the Arabic *hashasheen*, meaning hashish-eater – while it produced an introspective, soporific effect in western Europeans. Subsequent research has tended to support this analysis.

It was during the late summer of 1906, as Crowley was preparing for the Abramelin Operation, that a new friend entered his life. He was Captain John Frederick Charles Fuller of the 1st Oxfordshire Light Infantry. Their first contact had been when Fuller, at the time stationed in Lucknow, had written to Crowley in Darjeeling saying he wished to try for the prize Crowley was offering for the critical essay on his work, and asked where he might obtain Crowley's books.

Fuller, who had served in the Boer War before being posted to India, was a very clever young officer. He had an astute and enquiring mind and, in time, became a famous military strategist, but it was his other qualities which attracted him to Crowley and vice versa. Fuller was interested in the occult, had written for the *Agnostic Journal*, considered himself a rationalist, was against hierarchical religions, and wanted a new, global religion to replace them, yet embracing their basic tenets.

Now, in the summer of 1906, he had returned to Britain on sick leave, suffering from enteric fever. Crowley and Rose met him at the Hotel Cecil. Their friendship began to form almost immediately. Crowley remembered in his autobiography, 'We regard it [Christianity] as historically false, morally infamous, politically

contemptible and socially pestilential.' They were also opposed to social revolution, shared a consensus of opinion on the works of many writers ranging from Keats to Nietzsche, were critical of 'military atheists', and considered themselves intellectual leaders. Only Fuller's hatred for religion in general was a sticking point.

After their meeting, Fuller set to work in earnest, assessing Crowley as a writer and, because it was pertinent, as a magician. He had, in fact, started his essay in Lucknow, but had set it aside. By October, he was finished and mailed it to Boleskine. As Fuller had been the only entrant, he won the prize, although it is highly doubtful if he ever received the £100 award. The essay was entitled *The Star in the West*. The star in question was Aleister Crowley.

It is a bizarre critical essay, its stance summed up by two sentences of text: 'It has taken 100,000,000 years to produce Aleister Crowley. The world has indeed laboured, and has at last brought forth a man.' Most of it was a direct assessment of Crowley's literary output and philosophy. Although it did not make mention of *The Book of the Law*, the ideas contained in it had somehow filtered through to Fuller, for he did espouse the religion of Crowleyanity.

When it was published in 1907, in a deluxe edition of one hundred signed copies produced by the Chiswick Press in a white-and-gold buckram binding, Crowley was pleased. It was 'trenchant and picturesque. Its only fault is a tendency to overloading. I could have wished a more critical and less adoring study of my work, but his enthusiasm was genuine, and guaranteed our personal relations in such sort that my friendship with him is one of the dearest memories of my life.' It was sent out for review and received some attention. Even Florence Farr reviewed it without rancour. There were many, however, who were not so kindly disposed towards Crowley. Many Golden Dawn members still wanted their revenge, not to mention Mathers and his followers, other writers and the members of the Alpine Club, who considered he had besmirched their sport. Crowley put himself 'aloof from cliques and simply refused to admit the existence of the people who were playing at being poets, novelists and philosophers.'

In his autobiography, Crowley declares, 'The years 1, 2 and

1908 may be described as years of fulfilment. No new current came to stir my life; but the seeds which had been sown in the past came many of them to harvest.' Yet these years had their bitter moments.

It was around now that Crowley's substantial inheritance began to run out. The first signs were a comment he made to the effect that he had been facing problems at Boleskine, owing to 'the extravagance and dishonesty of my factor. While the cat was away the mice had been extremely busy.' He could have taken steps to salve his financial haemorrhage, could have settled down to a quiet married and magical life, yet he did not. As Allan Bennett remarked to Clifford Bax some years on, Crowley could have brought much goodness to the world but took a wrong turning in his life instead.

Bennett visited England from April to October 1908 before going back to Burma. Dressed in his monk's saffron robes and accompanied by a few acolytes, he was on a mission to establish an international Buddhist association. In later years, he had to return to Britain on account of his health. Suffering from asthma, liver disease and gallstones, he could barely breathe in the filthy London air and was only kept going by injections of legally prescribed heroin. Bax wrote of his appearance at the time:

> *Twenty years of physical suffering had twisted and scored it a lifetime of meditation upon universal love had imparted to it an expression that was unmistakable His colour was almost dusky, his mouth firm but in-sunken like that of an old man and his eyes had the soft glow of dark amber At first glance I realised that he never could have played at being a man of mystery Indeed, he thought nothing of himself He had passed, I believe, through experiences of more importance than those of any man in England, but he regarded them as early milestones on a road which all men, in the end must travel Above all, at the moment of meeting and always thereafter I was conscious of a tender and far shining emanation an unvarying psychic sunlight, that environed his personality.*

He summarised him. 'As a Buddhist, he was an alert and powerful personality: as a poor man, dwelling unknown in London,

he was a sick creature prematurely old.' His lodgings, which Bax visited, were 'small and in bad repair. His furniture – and that is to say, his worldly goods – consisted of two wicker chairs, a washing basin, a camp-bed, a number of books and reviews, neatly stacked on the floor, and a Burmese Buddha that presided over the room from the mantelpiece. The moths, I noticed, had eaten lustily of my friend's thin counterpane.' Bennett's coat, Bax observed, shed moths whenever he put it on: a good Buddhist, Bennett never harmed them and commented upon their beauty. He died in 1923 in Lavender Hill, Clapham.

Perhaps encouraged by Fuller's adulatory essay, Crowley believed he was now at the height of his poetic powers. He had, he declared in his autobiography,

> *come to my full stature as a poet. My technique was perfect, it had shaken off from its sandals the last dust which they had acquired by walking in the ways of earlier masters. I produced lyric and dramatic poetry which shows an astounding mastery of rhythm and rime, a varied power of expression which had no equal in the history of the language, and an intensity of idea which eats into the soul of the reader like vitriol. I should have been assigned publicly my proper place among my peers of the past without difficulty had it not been for one fatal fact. My point of view is so original, my thoughts so profound and my allusions so recondite that superficial readers, carried away by the sheer music of the words, found themselves, so to speak, intoxicated and unable to penetrate to the pith. People did not realize that my sonorous similes possessed a subtle sense intelligible only to those whose minds were familiar with the subject. People who like my poetry, bar those who are simply tickled by the sound or what they imagine to be the sense, agree that it spoils them for any other poetry.*

His self-esteem even went so far as to place him above the likes of 'Francis Thompson, W.B. Yeats, Rudyard Kipling, and later John Masefield, Rupert Brooke and other small fry, whose achievement at the best was limited by the narrowness of their ambitions.'

Who comprised his readership is a puzzle. Crowley's books still lay in unsold piles, and he knew that his audience was minute. Nevertheless, he continued to publish, not so much to try to break into the literary world – Crowley considered himself above cliques and schools – as to advertise himself and gain the recognition he thought his genius deserved. 'In response to a widely-spread lack of interest in my writings,' he wrote in the introduction to *Ambergris*, released in 1910, 'I have consented to publish a small and unrepresentative selection from the same ... The selection has been made by a committee of seven competent persons, sitting separately. Only those poems have been included which obtained a majority vote. This volume, thus almost ostentatiously democratic, is therefore now submitted to the British Public with the fullest confidence that it will be received with exactly the same amount of acclamation as that to which I have become accustomed.' His frustration at being still unrecognised clearly shines through.

Crowley's problem was one that has always bedevilled poets: even John Keats and that 'small fry', Rupert Brooke, suffered from it. It was vanity and the resultant inability to be self critical. Another writer who befriended Crowley and was to remain close to him until his death was Louis Umfraville Wilkinson. He acknowledged this flaw in his book *Seven Friends*, written under his pen name of Louis Marlow, and tried to curb Crowley's prolificity, but, inevitably, to no effect. Wilkinson was one of the few genuinely talented writers Crowley knew. They had much in common. He was the son of a clergyman who had rebelled against his upbringing, devoting himself to attacking society's moral and sexual hypocrisy. As a pupil at Radley College, he had corresponded with Oscar Wilde while he was serving time for 'committing acts of indecency' and had gone up to the University of Oxford only to be rusticated for blasphemy.

Ambergris was a volume of selected poems. Other books of this period were original works. The first of what Crowley classed as his literary *annus mirabilis* was a book entitled, *Clouds without Water*. Consisting of suggestively risque poems, it was supposedly written by the Rev. C. Verey and 'privately printed

for circulation among Ministers of Religion'. The contents were inspired by women Crowley had met, one of them at the Ashdown Park Hotel. This was Vera 'one of the most exquisitely beautiful young girls, by English standards that ever breathed and blushed'), but she preferred to call herself Lola. The new baby was named after her. Another woman who influenced the work was Kathleen Bruce, whom Crowley had known in Paris and to whom he had dedicated *Rodin in Rime*. A pupil of Rodin, she introduced Crowley to 'the tortured pleasures of algolagny on the spiritual plane.' She was later to become a famous sculptress in her own right and married Captain Robert Scott, the Antarctic explorer. For the climax of the book, Crowley drew his inspiration from Ada Leverson, a close friend and supporter of Oscar Wilde, with whom he had had a brief but tempestuously passionate affair. A veritable beauty noted for her blonde hair and a profile said to resemble that of Sarah Bernhardt, she had separated from her husband, Ernest, in 1902, and was now embarked upon a career as a popular novelist. She and Crowley shared a similar sense of humour and cynicism.

During the memorable literary year ending in February 1908 Crowley wrote *The World's Tragedy*, his first attempt at autobiography. Considered by him to be 'beyond all question the high-water mark of my imagination, my metrical fluency, my wealth of expression, and my power of bringing together the most incongruous ideas so as to enrich my matter to the utmost', he wrote it flat out in five days in Eastbourne, where he was visiting his mother.

There has been much speculation about Crowley's relationship in adulthood with Emily Crowley. He professed in his writings and to his friends an abiding hatred for her, and all for which she stood. She was seldom far from his thoughts. On 21 September 1906, while he was preparing for the Abramelin Operation, he jotted in his diary a 'great poetical idea first for years . A son commits suicide in his mother's presence as the most cruel punishment he can devise.' Yet, despite this animosity, he remained in frequent contact with her. Indeed, his diary for 1906 is scattered with entries recording his going to Eastbourne, where

she was living in a house with two elderly, hypocritical Plymouth Sisters and some 'mangebitten cats', where just 'one food was on the table for breakfast, lunch, and dinner; and that food cold boiled Jesus.' Looking at the two old biddies, Crowley realised how they must once have been happy young girls, and he decided that it was his responsibility, in future, 'to bring the truth into this England of hypocrisy' so no others suffered a similar fate. Wandering about the Downs, revisiting the site of his earliest climbing exploits on Beachy Head, meditating and lying in the grass with a girl called Mabel, whom he presumably respected less than a trained flea, Crowley determined to start setting the world to rights. And so *The World's Tragedy* was born. He declared that it was his gift to the boys and girls of England, a 'charter of their freedom.'

Over these years, Crowley applied himself to other writing. At the end of 1906, he was ill once more. On 1 January 1907, his diary reads bleakly, 'At Bournemouth, recovering from Throat troubles.' At his doctor's insistence, he had gone there on 11 December to take the salt sea air, considered beneficial. Four days later, Crowley began writing what became known as *Liber* 777, only breaking off from it to walk along the seafront or spend a day here and there in London with friends. He found Bournemouth dull. His diary entry for 29 January, is stark and heartfelt – 'Left B'mouth – one may hope for ever.'

Crowley described *Liber* 777 as a 'complete Dictionary of the Correspondences of all magical elements, making it the only standard comprehensive book of reference ever published. It is to the language of Occultism what Webster or Murray is to the English language.' Referred to as a qabalistic dictionary, it contained in the main a comparative table of religious symbolism and imagery. It was a thin book, but it was the first of its kind, which Crowley was to refine and extend through the years to come. In truth, it was not all his own work. It had been begun by Allan Bennett and Mathers, the former's notes contained in his magical notebooks which he gave to Crowley when he left for Ceylon in 1900. In fairness to Crowley, when it was published in 1909, it was not attributed to him but was brought out anonymously.

Not content with poetry, qabalistic studies and the emancipation of Britain's youth, Crowley embarked upon a career as an essayist. He certainly had the qualifications. He was well educated, extraordinarily widely read, opinionated, erudite (if often verbose) and witty. Rarely pedantic, he nevertheless wrote with the better educated in mind and, like his symbolically obtuse poetry, a good deal of what he produced went over the heads of most of his readers.

As with his other literary outpourings, Crowley made little if any financial profit from his essays. His income until he was into his thirties came exclusively from his inheritances. He never, at any time in his life, held down a job. Had his capital been carefully managed, he could have comfortably lived his entire life on the income generated, even allowing himself some self-indulgences if not, perhaps, as grand as trying to climb in the Himalayas. He could certainly have followed his magical leanings. Yet this was not in Crowley's nature. He was a live for the-moment, live-life-to-the-full kind of person, a compulsive life addict. Whatever he did, for as long as it held his attention and interest, he did to the absolute limit. He kept copious diaries (both secular and magical, frequently making entries in English, Hebrew, Pitman's shorthand and Arabic), wrote avidly, read with a hunger for knowledge rather than for entertainment, maintained a large correspondence with all manner of people, and even put his mind to inventing games or puzzles. On 7 April 1907, for example, he included in his diary a design for a puzzle-type game entitled *The Awkward Squad* or *The Mutineers*. Over the coming weeks, he invented a tube puzzle and a gadget for playing indoor golf.

When he was not at home in London, Crowley had a number of favourite haunts around the city. Some were restaurants or pubs. One was a pharmacy in Stafford Street, near Piccadilly Circus, run by a man called E.P. Whineray. A gruff Lancastrian with a bald head, heavy eyebrows, sharp eyes and a cynical laugh, he was said by Crowley to be discreet, understand every aspect of human frailty and know all 'London's secrets.' As indeed he might, for Whineray was a purveyor of narcotics and other drugs

to the wealthy and well-to do, although it must be pointed out that many of these were legally supplied. Yet people of position wanted their use and addiction kept understandably quiet. It is virtually certain that he was Crowley's drug source as well, for he obtained (or made up) for him such substances as *kyfi*, an ancient Egyptian incense, and the Abramelin ritual perfumes and oils. As Crowley was experimenting widely with hashish throughout 1906, it seems more than likely that he purchased his supplies from Whineray, who, some years later, was arrested after the ratification of the Dangerous Drugs Act for prescription irregularities.

It was through this pharmacist that Crowley was introduced to someone to whom he refers in his autobiography as the Earl of Coke and Crankum. His real identity was George Montagu Bennet, 7th Earl of Tankerville, a former aide-de-camp to the Duke of Marlborough during his time as Lord Lieutenant of Ireland. They first met on 21 February 1907 when the Earl informed Crowley that his mother, Lady Olivia, the eldest daughter of the 6th Duke of Manchester, was (with another woman's connivance) trying to kill him by witchcraft. It was plain to Crowley that the Earl was paranoid, possibly because of his cocaine habit. Nevertheless, Crowley agreed to try to counteract the witchcraft and, simultaneously, cure the Earl's paranoia. This was not done out of a sense of philanthropy. Crowley received a salary and all his expenses.

After due consideration, Crowley said the only alternative was for Tankerville to develop his own magical powers to counteract those of his mother and her co-conspirator. For some weeks, they met or corresponded frequently, Crowley sending Tankerville books to study and regularly reading his tarot cards to find them not auguring well. To be alone, Crowley had Tankerville charter a yacht moored just upstream from Bucklers Hard in the seclusion of the Beaulieu River in Hampshire. On board, Crowley began to teach his pupil how to establish his astral body. After a week or so of this, Crowley announced that they should go together on a magical retirement to foreign climes, Tankerville footing the bill.

Accordingly, they set off, reaching Marseilles by way of Paris on 29 June. On May Day, they boarded the P&O liner *Mongolia* bound for Gibraltar, whence they crossed to Tangiers, which they reached on 6 July. Crowley, believing correctly that cocaine was psychologically rather than physiologically addictive, hoped the fresh air of a desert march might cure Tankerville of his habit. Arriving in Tangiers, they were informed that they could not leave the town because Morocco was in civil turmoil. Instead, Crowley dressed himself in a burnous and took himself off to the *suq*, 'courting all adventures that might come my way.' He had 'a perfectly gorgeous time', as well he might with his predilection for – and the availability of – young men. Tankerville did not join in the fun: the Earl was, to put it simply, hard work. He kept on chiding Crowley for being disrespectful. For his part, Crowley did not respect his employer. For one, he was a wife beater which Crowley, Rose's initial spanking aside, was not. Tankerville had twice so injured his wife as to make her miscarry. The Earl's paranoia not abating, he accused his mother of incest with the 6th Duke of Manchester, adultery, lesbianism and witchcraft. Crowley found talking to the testy Earl 'like being in a cage with a wild beast. One daren't take one's eye off him, as it were. One single unguarded word, the result of irritation or indignation, and he would, I really believe, go raving mad.'

The civil turmoil in Morocco ended with the Sultan being overthrown. The populace rejoiced. The countryside now safer, but Tankerville still determined not to enter into the spirit of things, Crowley took several 'lonely adventure walks', during one of which he came upon a crowd of dervishes engaged upon a secret dance. Crowley murmured a mantra which rendered him 'invisible', allowing him to join the throng. He described the scene in his autobiography:

> *The women were present, though they took no active part, and merely helped to keep the ring. The circle was some thirty feet across. Squatting on its edge were the usual musicians playing as usual for dear life, while dancing and yelling were a number of men, armed with very small light axes of peculiar workmanship. They were evidently not*

the ordinary tools used in daily life, but manufactured for the purpose of the ceremony. With these weapons the men cut themselves on the head (very rarely elsewhere) until the blood was streaming from their scalps on every side. They were, of course, quite unconscious of any pain, and those of them who were actually blinded by the blood were yet able to see.

The excitement of the event gripped him but, resisting the temptation to join in, he invisibly melted away again.

Tankerville, whose attitude towards Crowley is adequately summed up by his complaint of 7 July – 'I'm sick of your teaching – teaching – teaching – as if you were God Almighty and I were a poor bloody shit in the street!' – soon let his paranoia get the better of him: he believed Crowley was party to his mother's conspiracy. Crowley, realising there was little more to be achieved, and no sign that the Earl was good for any further income, called it a day. They left Morocco for Spain and Granada. Crowley thought the Alhambra somehow familiar, deciding he had been there in a former life. After visiting gypsies living near the town in caves, he made a rendezvous with one with whom he 'experienced the spontaneous and irresistible stroke of love which only exists when the beauty of the human form and the beauty of the rest of nature are harmonized automatically.' The lovemaking was the inspiration for a poem called 'La Gitana', which he considered the best lyrical poem he had ever written.

Back in Britain, with the burden of the Earl removed, Crowley found himself writing a number of magical texts. How they came to him was puzzling. They were not dictated like *The Book of the Law* yet did not arrive by automatic writing, although Crowley says he was not conscious all the time he wrote them. The primary books were called *Liber Cordis Cincti Serpente* and *Liber Iberi vel Lapidis Lazuli*. In addition, he wrote a number of magical essays and perversely decided to write a body of hymns for the Blessed Virgin Mary, from the Roman Catholic standpoint. It was a poetic test as much as anything else: Crowley, being the greatest poet of his age, was able to see

the world through another's eyes, even to the extent of looking at a hated religion.

It was in the summer of 1907 that Crowley began to take in magical pupils. After his experience with the Earl of Tankerville, he seems to have realised that his magical abilities were a marketable commodity. Indeed they were. Society was interested in the occult. The backlash against Victorian repression was gathering momentum. Spiritualism was growing fast and mediums so common they advertised in newsagents' windows. The growth of education and the awareness of scientific progress fostered a new curiosity.

Certainly, by 1912, Crowley was earning a steady if not huge income from pupils, most of them wealthy, giving him not only an occasional financial boost but also an introduction into society. As his own private wealth declined, removing him from the wealthy set, so his reputation took his money's place and kept him well connected in some circles. The artist Nina Hamnett, writing in her autobiography *Laughing Torso*, remembered visiting Crowley, whom she had been warned was clever and wicked but whom she found highly intelligent, although she was always wary of him. He commissioned her to paint some elemental panels for him: the one for fire was so potent it apparently thrice set light to Crowley's studio in one day. While there, she met a deaf but 'rich marmalade manufacturer, who had come to study magic.' Crowley had given him a drug which induced bright colours. He was sitting languidly by the fireplace. Crowley occasionally gave him a piece of paper, asking him for impressions of what he was seeing. Hamnett recorded Crowley's annoyance when one answer came back, 'I see coloured patterns like the tiles in the Victoria and Albert Museum.'

It is easy to denigrate Crowley for taking on pupils. Those who believed he was a charlatan regarded his teaching as a conning of the gullible, while those who shared his magical beliefs criticised him for selling his integrity, not to mention his magical secrets. Yet Crowley took his responsibility seriously. He believed he had to teach, that it was one of the *raisons d'être* of his life: like his father, with whom he may well have identified

in this matter, he was here on earth to spread the knowledge of salvation, albeit not one given by Christ. The reading lists handed to pupils were eclectic and intellectually demanding – and Crowley had read every book on them. He was, apart from giving magical instruction, providing a very detailed and well-thought-out course in the liberal arts and, even if he was taking money for it, he was still doing the Secret Chiefs' bidding, spreading the word.

On 25 March 1907, Crowley rented rooms on the fourth floor of 60 Jermyn Street, only a few minutes' walk from Whineray's chemist's shop. Yet the proximity of his narcotic supplier was not the reason for the move. Crowley needed a place to himself. Rose's condition was deteriorating and, as the summer progressed, so did her consumption of alcohol until she was drinking, on average, over a bottle of spirits a day, usually gin or whisky. Finally, in the autumn, she agreed to go to a clinic in Leicester to dry out. She seemed to comply with the regime and, after a fortnight's hillwalking and rock-climbing with Crowley, returned to London in good health. Ten days later, she was drunk. 'I did everything that was humanly possible,' Crowley said, 'but it was fighting a losing game.' It is true he did much for Rose but he could have done more, staying with her instead of going off with Tankerville: but then Tankerville was paying.

By the late spring of 1908, Rose was in a very bad state. She was a cunning alcoholic, and Crowley only occasionally caught her imbibing. They were living at 21 Warwick Road, Earls Court, when Crowley quietly followed her one evening into the dining room in the basement of the house. Rose was ostensibly locking up for the night. Within a matter of seconds, he saw her go to the sideboard, remove a bottle of Scotch, pour a hefty slug, knock it back and return the bottle. She moved so fast, Crowley described her action as 'an act of prestidigitation.'

Crowley discussed the matter with Gerald Kelly, Oscar Eckenstein and the family doctor. They concurred. It might be a good idea if Crowley went away for a while, refusing to return until she stopped drinking. Crowley still protested his love for Rose and he was probably being genuine. In his own

self-centred way, he did love her. On 28 April, Crowley departed for Paris and took lodgings in the Hôtel de Blois at 50 rue Vavin in the Latin Quarter, which he was to use as his Paris base over the coming years.

It was not his only trip away from London that year. Crowley lived a peripatetic lifestyle. Although based in London, he was forever wandering restlessly about, going up to Boleskine, down to Eastbourne or over to Paris.

While in Paris, Crowley started to write short stories. They were mainly macabre tales, yet this was not because of Crowley's mindset. Bizarre, chilling horror stories were a popular genre, and he might have wondered whether, his poetry barely turning a penny, he might earn something as a fiction writer. Popular magazines were paying good money for such material. That said, Crowley appears not to have submitted his work very widely; or, if he did, it was not good enough compared to the competition. Certainly, it would have been read by editors. Crowley's celebrity in certain circles in London was growing. Through taking in pupils, his name was gaining currency, as was his reputation for 'wickedness', no doubt enhanced by his being known as a ladies' man. Yet there was more to it than that: he was charismatic, charming (when he wanted to be), a fine conversationalist and, above all, that creature so beloved of the British – an eccentric.

Crowley's stories fitted the genre. 'The Soul Hunter' was about a mad doctor who drugged his enemy, certified his death, set his corpse in plaster of Paris and vivisected his brain to find his soul. Crowley remarked that it was 'a nice Christmassy idea.' In 'Cancer', a famous artist thought he had throat cancer. His doctor diagnosed him as neurasthenic and prescribed a motoring holiday in the Pyrenees. Once in the mountains, the doctor cut his throat. Another tale, 'The Dream Circean', concerned a man who rescued a young girl from her mother's malice: the parallel with Crowley's 'saving' of Rose by marrying her was obvious.

Paris boring him after a short while, Crowley went to Venice. That lacked excitement, so he returned to Paris, all the time writing short stories. Back in Paris, he received a

letter from the Rev. Kelly saying he could now come back to England. Crowley returned, and he and Rose went to Sandwich for a fortnight. It was plain she was worse than ever, sneaking out at dawn to appear at breakfast completely sozzled.

Rose was a lost cause and, in the first week of July, Crowley once again journeyed to Paris. Joining him there was his latest acolyte. They were to influence each other's lives for many years to come.

In November 1906, William Stewart Ross (aka Saladin), the editor of the *Agnostic Journal*, had died. At his funeral, J.F.C. Fuller met a twenty three year-old Jew, Victor Benjamin Neuburg, who had just gone up to Trinity College, Cambridge, to study languages and who had read some of Crowley's poetry. They fell into conversation and became acquainted.

Like Crowley, Neuburg had rebelled against his parents and had suffered a repressed childhood. His mother had doted upon him and, although he had been loved as a child, he found his parents unimaginative and intellectually mundane. They were also religiously inclined and believed one should not be happy because that would displease God, whom he regarded as tyrannical and vengeful. When, up at Cambridge, Neuburg realised there were others in the world who thought as he did, he was liberated. Writing poetry, he started submitting to editors. Ross accepted one for criticism in the *Agnostic Journal*: later a poem appeared in the *Freethinker*. Neuburg's literary career was launched.

Fuller told Crowley about Neuburg. According to Crowley's diary, they first met in Cambridge on 27 February 1907, when Crowley arrived at Neuburg's rooms in Trinity College and entered unannounced, as he was wont to do, saying he had come across some of Neuburg's poetry which, he attested, showed evidence of astral travel.

His trip to Cambridge was not deliberately to meet Neuburg. The city was somewhere Crowley frequently visited. He liked the atmosphere there, felt a certain nostalgia for the place, and trawled the streets and colleges for magical pupils or followers. He may also have taken the

opportunity to find a transient lover or two among the undergraduates or local barmaids and shopgirls.

Over the next few days, Crowley and Neuburg met several times, going to the Magpie and Stump debate on 1 March, in which Crowley took part. Crowley found the young man unkempt, careless of his appearance, somewhat grimy from irregular bathing, suffering from halitosis, nervous, excitable, widely read, witty and good-natured; he also found him to be an agnostic, a vegetarian and a mystic. He possessed strongly Jewish features, a large head, curly brown hair, dark hooded eyes and had very thick lips which, Crowley wrote, 'three times too large for him, and had been put on hastily as an afterthought, emitted the most extraordinary laugh that had ever come my way.' This disconcerting, almost uncouth, laugh was described by Jean Overton Fuller, Neuburg's friend and biographer, as 'a high pitched unmodulated cackle, sustained upon a single note.'

Above all this, however, Crowley saw something else in Neuburg. He was magically gifted and impressionable. When he left Cambridge on 3 March, Crowley tersely wrote in his diary, 'Returned to town – so endeth the First Missionary Journey.' He had found a new and important disciple.

One aspect of Neuburg excited Crowley. His new friend already had some experience of clairvoyance and spiritualism. He may have been naive and shabbily dressed, but he was already interested in magic, and Crowley soon knew that in Neuburg he had not only a devotee but also someone whom he could induct into his religion who would accept him as his master. As it turned out, in more ways than one.

From Neuburg's point of view, he was fascinated by esoteric matters, was eager to learn and knew all about Secret Chiefs and Masters. Now, in the form of Crowley, he met one in the flesh who was prepared to take him on as an apprentice of magic. Crowley represented everything Neuburg had been secretly hoping for – a sage, a guru, a holy teacher whom he, the lowly university student, could follow. Within those few days of March, it is almost certain that Neuburg fell in love with Crowley, both as a magician and as a man.

In 1935, Neuburg told Jean Overton Fuller how he had regarded Crowley in those first days of their association. In Neuburg's biography, she wrote, 'In simple words, he described Crowley to me as he had seen him in the early days: his build, his walk and deportment, which was very dignified and had something leonine in it, his features, his broad brow. "I thought he was a noble person. I think you would have thought so, too."' Indeed, Crowley was an attractive figure. He cut a dash and was quick to impress. In researching her biography, Jean Overton Fuller spoke to Gerald Kelly, who said, 'When I first knew him [Crowley] he was an utterly delightful person', adding that he was an extrovert, educated, humorous and muscular, but tempering this praise by remarking: 'he was not a gentleman. He had certain vulgarisms. But', Kelly admitted, 'he was very good company.'

As with Tankerville, Crowley started Neuburg off with his comprehensive reading list, somewhat to the latter's disadvantage as he was already burdened with a hefty reading load for his degree. Yet this new, exceedingly catholic list opened Neuburg's mind well beyond his university studies, as did his conversations with Crowley, conducted during sessions of mutual cannabis or hashish smoking.

In Cambridge, Neuburg was a seminal member of the Cambridge University Freethought Association and an undergraduate circle called the Pan Society, to which Crowley was invited on several occasions to present papers on mysticism, giving these talks in undergraduates' rooms. All would have been well had not the Cambridge Inter-Collegiate Christian Union got wind of it and kicked up a ruckus, complaining to Crowley's old college, Trinity, in which Neuburg was enrolled. An anonymous letter to the college, more than likely sent by one of the Union members, accused Crowley of pederasty. The Dean of the college, the Rev. R. St J. Parry, instructed the gate porters to prevent Crowley from entering the college.

The Dean's stand not only annoyed Crowley: it also enraged another Trinity undergraduate, a mathematics scholar called Norman Mudd. A member of the Pan Society and secretary

of the Freethought Association, he was hauled before the Dean and told to cancel all Crowley's invitations to speak, his presence in his old college no longer being acceptable. Mudd called a meeting of the Association members and they decided to stand up to Parry.

The dispute was to rumble on, although Crowley continued to give his occasional lectures. Parry fulminated but he had an Achilles' heel: he was afraid of slandering Crowley. Finally, Crowley was to meet Parry face to face and asked him point blank what objections existed to his giving talks. Parry procrastinated, saying he did not object to Crowley's talking of magic but to his sexual morality. Their meeting was inconclusive: neither man gave ground. Parry formally excluded Crowley from the college grounds which was, strictly speaking, beyond his powers. As a Trinity man, Crowley had lifelong access. Parry then threatened to send down – in other words, expel – from the university all members of the Freethought Association, even though they were mostly students in other colleges and beyond his discipline. Neuburg tended to be judiciously ignored by Parry because his family were wealthy and could have become benefactors of the university. However, knowing that Mudd was the son of a schoolmaster, and neither wealthy nor well connected, the Dean threatened to nullify his scholarship.

With such a sword of Damocles hanging over his head, Mudd understandably caved in. He gave his word not to associate with Crowley or attend Pan Society meetings, and he quit the Freethought Association, but this was a sop to Parry. When Crowley visited the university, to talk to other students in other colleges, Mudd went to listen. What Parry could not know was that Mudd had become a Crowleyite. In later years, Mudd was to write of his first meeting and association with Crowley: 'I then understood for the first time what life was or might be; and the spark of that understanding has been ever since, apparently unquenchable, working always (consciously or unconsciously), in spite of all my failure, betrayals, baseness, and desperate absorption in worldly matters, always reviving again when I least expected it, always potent by the challenge of its

mere presence to convert instantly all other aims and ambitions into dust and ashes.'

Throughout his undergraduate years, Crowley kept in contact with Neuburg. At the end of the summer term of 1908, Neuburg went to Paris to meet Crowley, furthering their relationship. The bond that developed between them was an odd one. Neuburg was not, like Crowley, a cosmopolitan animal. Despite studying languages, he was barely fluent even in French. He was also gullible and open to Crowley's often quite cruel sense of humour.

One example tells of Neuburg's concern at drinking absinthe, which he had been told was dangerous: in even a small quantity, it could be lethal. Crowley concurred with this but told Neuburg one night at a party that he could drink Pernod with impunity. And he did. He was soon very drunk and making fumbling advances to the ladies present. Crowley knew – or sensed – that Neuburg was a virgin and seized the moment. One of the women present was Euphemia Lamb, an extraordinarily beautiful and highly intellectual woman who frequently posed for the well-known artist Augustus John. She was the 'Dorothy' of a number of Crowley's poems and had slept with him from time to time. Not only was she intellectually sharp, but she had a similar sense of humour to Crowley's.

With her connivance, Crowley told Neuburg that Euphemia was in love with him. They soon became (supposedly) engaged. At the same time, Crowley took Neuburg to a brothel in rue des Quatre Vents in order to help him 'lose his cherry', which it seems he did. Crowley then pretended to hear of the 'engagement', convincing Neuburg that the only honourable thing he could do was admit his visit to the bordello to Euphemia, in detail. He complied. She feigned horror and stormed off. The pretence was kept up for several days until Crowley let Neuburg in on the jape. Neuburg refused to believe him and was only convinced when taken to Crowley's lodging to find Euphemia stark naked on the bed, apparently smoking a post-coital cigarette.

After the joke was exposed, Crowley claimed it had all

done Neuburg a world of good, for he was a new man, no longer nervous, a fussy eater or sartorially inelegant. What was more, with his inhibitions erased, he was now more receptive to magic.

There were other peculiar aspects to the Crowley/Neuburg friendship. From perhaps as early as March 1907, they had been homosexual partners: on 4 March, Crowley entered in his diary 'Sleeping off VN', which is ambiguous. It was not merely lust which drove Crowley to debauch Neuburg. He wanted to disillusion him, remove his dignity and idealism. This may well have satisfied Crowley's sadistic tendencies but it was, he stated, for Neuburg's good. By reducing him so, he was fortifying his soul and preparing him for the magical ordeals ahead.

Doubtless, Crowley enjoyed dominating Neuburg and took considerable pleasure from shaping this wealthy, naive, upper-middle-class Jewish boy into an obedient and pliable slave. It was as if he was finally, after many years of deliberately or subconsciously kicking against the traces of his own upbringing, able to get hold of someone who had had a refined and decent upbringing (as he had) and turn the tables on all he despised by creating a person not unlike himself. In short, in Neuburg Crowley was not only sinning but manufacturing his own custom made sinner. Or was it that Crowley really believed that Neuburg was a potential seer, a male equivalent of the Scarlet Woman?

Deciding it was time that Neuburg came face to face with harsh reality, Crowley suggested they go on a walking tour through northern Spain. On 31 July 1908, they went by train from Paris to Bayonne, then struck out over the Pyrenees to Pamplona. It was hard going. The weather was hot and they found the desolate mountains majestic but largely unpopulated, making it difficult to find food. As they progressed, they became dirtier and shabbier. In the villages they passed through, they were taken for beggars or thieves and arrested several times as anarchists. Crowley disliked the lazy peasantry but found their poverty appalling and deduced it existed because 'the Church sucks the life-blood of the people.'

From Pamplona, they went to Logroño, Soria and Burgo de Osma where they arrived in time for a fiesta and a bullfight with which Crowley was much taken. 'I was able [he wrote in his autobiography] to perceive a fact which I had never guessed: that blood on the shoulder of a bull in the Spanish summer sunlight is the most beautiful colour that exists. In the whole of my memories I had only one fact to set against it: the green of a certain lizard which ran across my path on a hillside in Mexico. It is, in fact, very rare to see pure colours in nature; they are nearly always mixed or toned down. But when they do appear they are overwhelming.' Eventually, travelling over the Sierra de Guadarrama in the brazen heat of a Spanish summer, they arrived in Madrid, where Crowley toured the Prado while Neuburg overcame his exposure to sun, dust, foul food and fatigue and considered Crowley's advice to have his periodontal disease (the cause of his bad breath) and a varicocele in his testicle attended to upon returning to Britain. When Neuburg was recovered, they set off for Granada, Gibraltar and Tangiers, where Crowley 'revelled once more and rejoiced to feel myself back among the only people on earth with whom I have ever felt any human affinity. My spiritual self is at home in China, but my heart and my hand are pledged to the Arab.'

On their perambulations, Crowley meditated a great deal upon the path of his life ahead. He was sworn to preaching the cause of magic and knew that this would bring him public attention, controversy and, probably, ridicule, hostility and notoriety. There would be those who regarded him as a vulgar opportunist and a fraud, yet this was just going to be something he would have to accept, as would any martyr to any cause in which he unequivocally believed. He therefore decided to make quite sure of how he appeared: public relations was going to be an important skill and he had to acquire it (which, sadly, he never did). To this end, he determined to live as an honourable gentleman, making it plain that he was not in it for money but would sacrifice his own fortune to it. That this was dwindling fast seems to have slipped his mind. In addition, he determined not to compromise. His faults would not be

hidden. Everything he did would be of quality. He would show, unequivocally, that spiritual progress was not dependent upon religious or moral codes but on an understanding of the individual's will. As soon as was possible, he would go on a magical retirement and start writing again, but now with the purpose of proclaiming his doctrine of teaching mankind how to aspire to a new condition.

Neuburg, in the meantime, had to be trained in the ways of magic. Rarely psychic himself, Crowley was certain that Neuburg possessed mediumistic powers placing him on the edge of the material and astral worlds, and worked upon him: he was to be Crowley's psychic connection. Crowley had found it easy to raise material manifestations of whatever he chose – from deities to demons – but these had been independent of his will. With Neuburg, they could be conjured up as desired for, as a medium, he was in psychic or magical communication with the astral world.

There was a drawback. As his careless sense of dress and personal hygiene indicated, Neuburg was undisciplined. Crowley set to organising him. Neuburg was not quick to comply. When he refused to carry out his yoga exercises on the ferry from Tangiers to Gibraltar, because he was afraid people would stare at him, Crowley – who was indifferent to opinion – made Neuburg swear a Vow of Holy Obedience. In this way, Crowley ascertained, he could uncover Neuburg's prejudices while Neuburg could come to terms with and address his weaknesses.

By the time they reached Britain, Neuburg belonged to Crowley in more ways than one. Neuburg was in love with him and, through this love, was getting in touch with aspects of himself of which he was previously unaware. Essentially bisexual, Neuburg was embarked upon a voyage of emotional, revelatory, even ecstatic self-discovery with his Sweet Wizard, as he referred to Crowley.

In the autumn of 1908, Neuburg went back to Cambridge for the final year of his degree course. Crowley took himself off to Paris for his magical retirement, then, returning to London, busied himself with the organisation of his new order.

There is some confusion as to when exactly Crowley founded it. Ever since his break from Mathers, he had contemplated setting up his own Rosicrucian Order with himself at the helm. When it came to it, he considered the tripartite structure of the Golden Dawn – the First Order (or Golden Dawn itself), the Second Order (the Order of the Rosy Cross) and, finally, the *Argentinum Astrum* to which no human could aspire. However, Crowley already considered himself a Master, which put him on a par with the Secret Chiefs. He was, therefore, already a member of the *Argentinum Astrum*, so it was upon this that Crowley started to construct his own order from 1907. It was sometimes referred to by outsiders as the Order of the Silver Star, but Crowley cryptically called it the A∴A∴: what these letters exactly stand for remains to this day a secret to all but members.

The rituals and teaching were borrowed from the Golden Dawn, with addenda of yogic and other assorted oriental practices tacked on. Crowley also completely rewrote the Golden Dawn rituals in a somewhat less esoteric form, tending towards the A∴A∴ containing more reliance upon individual magical attainments than ritualistic formulæ.

At first, the sole membership of the A∴A∴ consisted of Crowley and George Cecil Jones, the latter playing a passive role. Crowley, as leader, called himself Frater (or Brother) V.V.V.V.V., from the Latin motto for a Master of his grade, *Vi Veri Vniversum Vivus Vici*. It translates as 'In my life I have conquered the universe with the power of truth'.

It was not long before people flocked to join. Some were time-wasters and sycophants but many were serious, intellectually curious young men and women, a few brilliant and all searching for something. They came as moths attracted to the flame of Crowley's genius, flamboyance and extravagance. With them mixed the young women whom Crowley and, later, Neuburg were to use as muses for their poetry. And everyone worshipped the Master. Crowley was in his element.

Among the first batch of members was J.F.C. Fuller and Neuburg, who, after his initiation in the spring of 1909, was

known as Frater Omnia Vincam ('I shall conquer all'). To join, Neuburg had abandoned his degree studies for a day just three weeks before his final examinations in order to travel up to London for the ceremony.

The temple and headquarters for the A∴A∴ were situated in a rented flat up five flights of stairs at 124 Victoria Street, close to Victoria Station and less than 300 yards from the gardens of Buckingham Palace. For the next few years, this was the centre of Crowley's magical activity.

What went on at this temple can only be guessed at but there are clues. In *The Great Beast*, John Symonds quotes a description of a magical session:

> *On one occasion the God came to us in human form (we were working in a locked temple) and remained with us, perfectly perceptible to all our senses, for the best part of an hour, only vanishing when we were physically exhausted by the ecstasy of intimate contact with His divine person. We sank into a sort of sublime stupor; when we came to ourselves, He was gone. Again, at Victoria Street, a number of us were dancing round the altar with linked hands and faces turned outwards. The temple was dimly lighted and thick with incense. Somehow the circle was broken, and we kept on dancing each for himself. Then we became aware of the presence of a stranger. Some of us counted the men present, and found there was one too many. One of the weaker brethren got scared, or one of the stronger brethren remembered his duty to science – I don't know which – and switched on the light. No stranger was to be seen.*

From this quotation, it is fairly implicit that there was a sexual aspect to the ceremony, and it is as likely drugs were used. Such were the magical forces raised here that, Crowley later recalled, a would be tenant looking at the rooms after the A∴A∴ had vacated them fled screaming down the stairs.

J.F.C. Fuller, or Frater Per Ardua, was active in more ways than as an A∴A∴ member. He was editing Crowley's magical diaries and ghost-writing an autobiography of his magical activities. They got along well together, often meeting every

day for long periods as Crowley recounted his experiences or explained a diary entry. All the while, Crowley was himself writing what amounted to books of magical instruction for use in the A∴A∴.

Another recently acquired friend who assisted Crowley's literary career was Frank Harris, the proprietor/editor of *Vanity Fair* from 1907 to 1909, who published some of Crowley's poems and translations from Baudelaire in the magazine, as well as taking articles on such subjects as the K2 and Kanchenjunga expeditions, Crowley's visit to Bennett in Burma, and the art of Lord Dunsany.

Their friendship was hardly surprising. Harris, who is credited with the dictum 'Sex is the gateway to life' was a notorious figure about town, described by Louis Wilkinson as 'a thorough-paced blackguard and the best of companions, flagrantly dishonest, shamelessly dishonourable, but, like Falstaff, a veritable strong water of life, rousing and reviving everyone who tasted him.' A reprobate and womaniser, Harris had had a chequered career. Like Crowley, he rejected his roots. After brief spells as a teacher and university lecturer, he became editor of the *London Evening News* and the *Fortnightly Review*, buying the *Saturday Review*. Marrying a rich widow, he became a Conservative parliamentary candidate, supported Oscar Wilde during his trials, bought a hotel in Monte Carlo which failed , returned to journalism, became Winston Churchill's literary agent, turned his hand successfully to being a novelist, biographer and essayist, became (ironically) the editor of the early woman's magazine *Hearth & Home*, had a succession of mistresses, travelled widely, and was generally accepted as a rake. His forthright autobiography, *My Life and Loves*, was justifiably considered scandalous.

Behind all this literary activity, Crowley was working on one big project close to his heart. He wanted to own, edit and publish an occult magazine, and founded *The Equinox*. The house publication of the A∴A∴, it was published from the Victoria Street temple, the first issue appearing in March 1909, the second following in September: they were published

on the equinox. Initially, one thousand were printed and bound in boards for sale at five shillings: a further fifty hard-bound special subscription copies sold for a guinea. As with his poetry, Crowley did not take account of the costs. If he had sold the entire issue at the cover price, he would have earned marginally over £300: production costs were £400. Had booksellers and newsagents taken it, they would have demanded a discount, which Crowley overlooked. Not that it mattered. The issue was large, and looked like a book with a white cover impressed with gold leaf, but was a periodical. It did not fit a sales niche, so no one took it on. Crowley did not mind. The important thing was the dissemination of the work.

Other investors shared this view. Neuburg put up some of the money. George Raffalovitch, the well-to do but spendthrift son of a Jewish banker in Odessa and a countess, gave £5,000 towards the A∴A∴ as a whole He, too, had fallen foul of his family, who had put a cap on his lavish spending habits. Crowley alleged he lent Raffalovitch large interest free sums of money that were never repaid: it is more likely to have been the other way around.

The first issue, which was subtitled 'The Official Organ of the A∴A∴ – The Review of Scientific Illuminism', contained a brief editorial, an outline of the A∴A∴, a number of assorted magical articles, including a lengthy introduction by Fuller to the first book of *The Temple of Solomon the King* (Crowley's magical biography), a poem by Crowley called 'The Wizard Way' and one by Neuburg, a story by Frank Harris ('The Magic Glasses') with another by Crowley ('At the Fork of the Roads'), an essay by Crowley entitled 'The Soldier and the Hunchback: ! and ?' and the first part of an extended essay entitled 'The Herb Dangerous' by Whineray. Inserted was a supplemental article on Crowley's recent magical retirement in Paris. The issue was illustrated by Fuller and the artist Austin Osman Spare.

Crowley was immensely pleased:

> *No previous book of its kind can compare with it for the perfection of its poetry and prose, the dignity and sublimity of its style, and*

the rigidity of its rule never to make any statement which could not be proved as precisely as the mathematician exacts. I confess to being entirely proud of having inaugurated an epoch. From the moment of its appearance it imposed its standards of sincerity, scholarship, scientific seriousness and aristocracy of all kinds, from the excellence of its English to the perfection of its printing, upon everyone with ambition to enter this field of literature.

He was bound to be pleased. Much of the contents of this and subsequent issues was his own work, much to Fuller's increasing annoyance although, to be fair, Crowley did allow others into the pages, including a lesser-known poet called Meredith Starr, Ethel Archer, George Raffalovitch and an undergraduate of Magdalene College, Cambridge, called Arthur Grimble, whom Crowley had met on one of his trawls. Born in Hong Kong, Grimble was to become a famous colonial administrator, the Governor of the Seychelles: he was knighted and wrote *A Pattern of Islands*, a bestselling autobiographical account of his years as a colonial officer in the remote Pacific Gilbert and Ellice Islands. In later life, he not surprisingly suppressed his association with Crowley.

The Equinox did not have a wide readership but this did not deter Crowley from claiming that he had 'put a pearl of great price in a shop window, whose other exhibits were pasted diamonds and bits of coloured glass for the most part, and at best, precious stones of the cheaper and commoner kind.' Certainly, it was often imitated and has been a standard form for a number of occult magazines ever since. Much of its contents can now be found on the Internet: Crowley's ghost must be spinning with glee in the astral world.

Regardless of his ties to the A∴A∴, *The Equinox* and London, Crowley still roamed widely, to Paris, climbing in Wastdale, to Boleskine, to Oxford to study in the Bodleian Library. He was, as ever, restless.

In the summer of 1909, Crowley invited Neuburg and an undergraduate of Emmanuel College, Cambridge, called Kenneth Ward, whom he had met while climbing in Wastdale,

to stay at Boleskine. Neuburg was to go on a magical retirement in preparation for which Crowley set aside an upstairs bedroom. In this, he erected an altar with a magical sword and an ankh, and drew a magical circle on the floor. Upon arrival, Neuburg was cloistered in the room and started his ten-day-long retirement, keeping what turned out to be a 127-page record of his experiences. In the meantime, Crowley and Ward partook of the usual Boleskine summer pastimes of climbing, hillwalking and fishing.

At regular intervals, Crowley visited Neuburg to check up on his progress and give him instruction. An entry in Neuburg's magical diary indicates the form of some of the instruction: 'He [Crowley] is apparently a homosexual sadist for, in giving me thirty-two strokes with a gorse-switch which drew blood, he showed great unction. He performed the ceremony with obvious satisfaction. The ceremony was quite painful, though it aroused no emotion in me save that of laughter.' On reading this, Crowley added a footnote reading: 'Slandering one's Guru is punished in the thirty-second and lowest Hell.' To this, Neuburg penned a second note, 'A small price to pay for the invention of a new vice.' Crowley's sadism took other forms. He sent Neuburg out at night in his magical robes and a dressing gown to cut the gorse. He also thrashed him on his bare buttocks with stinging nettles and was abusively anti-Semitic. 'My Guru rude; his personalities are becoming monstrous. They are grossly offensive ... If I am again insulted I shall depart immediately,' Neuburg wrote. He could have packed his bag at any time, walked the mile to Foyers and caught the ferry to Inverness. Yet he stayed. The romantic, sadomasochistic bond between them was simply too strong.

It was not unusual for Crowley to express anti-Semitic sentiments He believed that Jews frequently earned their reputation although, he allowed, the 'Hebrew poets and prophets are sublime. The Jewish soldier is courageous, the Jewish rich man generous. The race possesses imagination, romance, loyalty, probity and humanity in an exceptional degree. But the Jew has been persecuted so relentlessly that his survival has depended on the development of his worst qualities; avarice, servility, falseness,

cunning and the rest.' Crowley's attitudes may today be condemned, but they were widely shared in contemporary Britain. His berating Neuburg was more likely intended to strengthen his character and psyche than abuse his racial origins.

When the ten days were over, Neuburg found his ordeal was not. He was now obliged to sleep every night naked on a layer of gorse on the floor of his room. It may have been midsummer but this was northern Scotland, and Neuburg spent many hours shivering. After some nights of such discomfort, Neuburg was made a Neophyte in the A∴A∴.

The party left Boleskine on 28 June but, just before going, Crowley went into the attic to look for a pair of skis for Kenneth Ward. He found them – and a flat parcel wrapped in brown paper. It contained the manuscript of *The Book of the Law*.

It was not that Crowley had forgotten it: more, he had temporarily mislaid it. He had made little of it because he was determined to keep it secret. To publish it would, he thought, diminish its importance. The only person who had seen it, in typescript, was Fuller, who, to Crowley's astonishment, had immediately judged it the work of a Master.

The discovery of the manuscript was seen by Crowley as a sign. He meditated and reached the conclusion that the Secret Chiefs were behind him, liberating him. It was, he knew, his responsibility to spread the word of *The Book of the Law* throughout the world.

Within weeks, Crowley wrote a magical poem entitled 'Aha!', which looked at religious experience and ended with the words 'Blessing and worship to the Beast, the prophet of the Lovely Star'. From then on, he considered himself a prophet ripe for initiation by the Secret Chiefs as a Master. Until now, it seems he had accepted the accolade and position without actually having formally acquired it.)

At last, Crowley's purpose was clear to him. He was the one destined to save humanity from itself, to set it on a new path of enlightenment.

> *I had come* [he remembered in his autobiography] *through a thousand crises to the climax of my career. I had attained all my*

ambitions proved myself at every point, dared every danger, enjoyed every ecstasy that earth had to offer the rest of my life recedes from romance in that boyish idea of what romance should be From this time, though much lay in store for me to accomplish, summit soaring beyond summit of spiritual success, giant ranged behind giant for me to challenge, I now learnt to look upon life with enlightened eyes I had sought and I had found I must now seek them who seek that they might also find I must aspire, act and achieve, not only for myself to perfect my personality, but for my fellow men in whom alone I could possibly fulfil myself since I knew myself at last, not to be Aleister Crowley, an individual independent of the communion of cosmic consciousness, but merely one manifestation of the Universal Mind whose thoughts must be sterile unless sown broadcast to blossom and bear fruit in every acre of God's vineyard.

His joy at having come to terms with his future and magical duty must have been somewhat dispelled by what was happening in his marriage.

At the beginning of 1909, several things occurred to bring the situation regarding Rose's alcoholism to a head. Crowley removed Lola Zaza from Rose's care, placing her in the charge of Rose's parents, and told her she would not get the child back until she dried out. At the same time, the doctor who had been treating Rose gave up her case and said the only way ahead was to have her put away for two years, which Rose refused. Crowley asked for a divorce. Rose had little choice but to agree.

As they had been married in Scotland, their marriage came under Scottish law. Furthermore, their place of permanent residence was registered as Boleskine, even if they spent most of their time away from the house. Crowley 'chivalrously' agreed to be the guilty party so the grounds for divorce could be adultery. Sufficient evidence was manufactured, though there was hardly the need. Once proceedings were under way, Rose pleaded to halt it and be taken back, yet Crowley stood firm. They continued to live together which, in theory, would have prevented the divorce from going ahead, but this fact was unknown in distant Scotland.

On 24 November, the decree was published. Rose was given as living at her parents' home in Camberwell while Crowley's address was the apartment at Warwick Road. Six days later, the same official as had issued their marriage warrant in Dingwall, Alex Dewar, ratified their divorce. Crowley was charged with paying £52 per annum alimony.

The divorce was, as far as Crowley was concerned, a formality as meaningless as the wedding. Marriage, he proclaimed, was 'a detestable institution', monogamy 'one of the most idiotic and bestial pieces of vanity in human psychology' and monogyny 'nonsense for anyone with a grain of imagination. The more sides he has to his nature, the more women he needs to satisfy it.' It was his opinion that marriage 'would lead to very little trouble if men would get rid of the idea that it is anything more than a financial and social partnership. People should marry for convenience and agree to go their separate ways without jealousy.' He also believed that a woman should not have children by other men unless her husband sanctioned it, which he would if he truly loved her for he would want her to be happy in the joy of bearing the child of a man whom she sexually desired. However, Crowley said, women were the main opponents to this concept because they had been indoctrinated into thinking that the welfare of themselves and their children relied upon the existing system which they were therefore keen to maintain.

It goes without saying that the marriage had not been smooth. Crowley's early spanking of Rose, within days of their wedding, was the least of it. He kept odd hours with what Rose must have seen as odd people, and it was even said that he more than once hung her upside down by her heels in a cupboard, which is not only apocryphal but outrageously unfair. Crowley loved Rose, albeit in his own, unconventional, fashion. Yet they really had little in common, and she had simply not been able or willing to keep up with him or enter into the spirit of his decidedly eccentric lifestyle. For a flighty and pretty vicar's daughter, Crowley was the least suitable spouse on the planet.

Although he could ill afford it, Crowley set up a trust

fund for money he was due to inherit for Lola Zaza and Rose. The nominated trustees, George Cecil Jones and Oscar Eckenstein, were charged with paying out the income when earned at their discretion to Lola Zaza and either Rose or Crowley, as they saw fit. For virtually the first time, Crowley was doing something sensible with his finances. Although he was a trustee, Eckenstein had more or less drifted apart from Crowley by the time the trust was established, distancing himself after the Kanchenjunga débâcle. He probably accepted his role as trustee because he was sympathetic to Rose's situation.

They may have been divorced but Crowley and Rose continued to live together. During the divorce proceedings, Crowley wrote a poem, 'Rosa Decidua', which gives a fairly graphic if poetic description of their situation. The predominant image, of the dying rose, is powerful and places the poem as one of Crowley's best. Even his divorce lawyer found it moving. When it was published in a limited edition, including a family photo of Rose, Crowley and their daughter taken *after* the divorce, Crowley sent a copy to Lord Salvesen, the judge who had granted the decree absolute. He even dedicated the thin volume to him.

Being divorced did little to address Rose's dipsomania. This is hardly surprising, considering that they still lived together when Crowley was in London. By the autumn of 1911, her condition deteriorating even further, Crowley decided to have her committed to an asylum as a victim of alcoholic dementia, such a remedy for drunkenness being not uncommon. On 27 September 1911, Rose was formally certified and passed out of Crowley's life.

When Rose was finally released from the asylum, apparently cured, she married Dr Gormley, whose ardour for her seemed undiminished by time. A Roman Catholic, Gormley had to buy a dispensation from the Vatican to marry a divorcee: when Crowley heard of this he remarked that he may have squandered money but never so foolishly. Rose, however, was not cured. She returned to drinking hard and died in 1932 of alcoholism.

The relationship between Crowley and Gerald Kelly, who was making a name for himself as an artist, was soured by the divorce and Crowley's attitude towards the Rev. Kelly and his wife. Kelly had also abhorred Crowley's treatment of his sister. Despite their early roistering together, he rarely communicated with Crowley, and went on to become an associate of the Royal Academy and a royally appointed portrait painter. Crowley was in dismay at Kelly's rise to fame: 'It saddens me more than I can say, to think of that young life which opened with such brilliant promise, gradually sinking into the slough of respectability. Of course it is not as if he had been able to paint; but to me the calamity is almost as distressing as if that possibility had ever existed. For he completely hypnotised me into thinking that he had something in him.' There is more than a hint of chagrin here. Kelly had achieved the recognition Crowley craved. He also condemned Kelly: 'He is described in the telephone book as an artist; and the statement might have passed unchallenged indefinitely had not the Royal Academy recently elected him as an associate. He is hardly to be blamed for this disgrace. He struggled manfully. Even at the last moment . . . he made a last desperate coup to persuade the world that he was an artist by marrying a model. But the device fooled nobody. The evidence of his pictures was too glaring.' In the manuscript of his autobiography, Crowley vented his spleen with a piece of doggerel which ran:

Gerald Kelly's pictures are extraordinary grand,
Gerald Kelly's pictures are entirely done by hand.
Every little picture tells a story of its own.
Every little sitter – well, the tailoring alone!
Every little picture is according to the rules:
Gerald Kelly learnt it all in such a lot of schools.
Gerald Kelly laboured till he caught the tony trick
Gerald K— Excuse me, I am going to be sick!

Kelly's opinion of Crowley was even lower. John Napper, Kelly's assistant in the 1930s, reported to the artist's biographer

how Crowley arrived one day at Kelly's studio. 'G.K. threw down his brushes,' he remembered, 'and rushed off down the passage. There was a sound of a violent altercation and a shriek, the front door slammed and G.K. came back into the studio looking exactly like a bantam cock – and in such a rage that he could hardly speak for five minutes.' Quite possibly, Crowley had come round to see if the famous artist was willing to make him a loan. It was not beyond Crowley to suddenly contact a one-time friend or acquaintance whom he had not seen for years to see if they were good for a few pounds. Somerset Maugham, who had known Crowley only in Paris, once received a cable from him. It read: 'Please send twenty-five pounds at once. Mother of God and I starving. Aleister Crowley.' Maugham later remarked, 'I did not do so, and he lived on for many disgraceful years.'

12

Magical Trials and Legal Tribulations

With his divorce well under way, Crowley and Neuburg had left Britain on 10 November 1909, bound for Algeria. Neuburg, being an A∴A∴ neophyte, was now Crowley's *chela*, a Buddhist term for a novice, and his magical subordinate.

Like all good minions, Neuburg kept his distance from his master, whom he addressed as either Holy Guru or, more familiarly, AC: few people dared called Crowley Aleister to his face, and there were those who believed that if one uttered his full name he could use the familiarity to take the utterer into his power.

They landed in Algiers on 18 November and caught the funicular railway to El Arba, whence, after provisioning themselves, they set out on foot into the desert. The first few nights they slept in primitive wayside inns but soon, leaving permanent human habitation behind, they pitched camp under the stars, curling up in their sleeping bags as the desert night grew cold. This, Crowley declared, was the way to see a country, on foot and not from the inside of a motor car or a luxurious train compartment.

Taking in the sights and experiencing the adventure were seemingly Crowley's main intention for making the trip: he was satisfying his wanderlust and consequently ignored the warnings of French officials in Algiers that he and Neuburg might easily fall foul of bandits. Certainly, at the start, he had no magical aim in mind, although he did travel with some of his magical robes and paraphernalia, including a jewelled cross set with a large topaz. These trappings, which included a large gold ring

containing a hefty star sapphire Crowley had bought in Ceylon, served more than a magical purpose. He hoped these might impinge his majesty upon anyone they met. Just displaying the ring gained respect. In a coffee shop, Crowley drew astrological symbols in the air with it while intoning the Koran, thus ending an argument among his fellow patrons. Reciting the Koran was something Crowley did every day.

Crowley believed, probably rightly, that his recitations and magical jewels really did impress the local Arabs. However, he was just as sure his neophyte did not. Neuburg, walking 'with his shambling gait and erratic gestures, his hangdog look and his lunatic laugh', detracted from any impact Crowley made. Something had to be done to address this negativity, so Crowley cut all Neuburg's hair off save for two tufts, one on each side, which he dyed red and twisted into the shape of vestigial horns. The neophyte was now a tamed demon and Crowley's familiar. This disguise had the desired effect. 'The more eccentric and horrible Neuburg appeared [Crowley noted], the more insanely grotesquely he behaved, the more he inspired the inhabitants with respect for the Magician who had mastered so fantastic and fearful a genie.' The impact was increased by Crowley, temporarily sporting a full beard, completely shaving his own head except for a single tuft in the middle of his forehead and choosing to wear an Arab burnous and keffiyeh as well as his magical ceremonial robes. Neuburg took this treatment with equanimity. He slavishly obeyed his master and probably enjoyed sharing in his sadism.

By 22 November, this odd couple had reached Aumale, today known as Sour el Ghozlane, where they checked into the Hotel Grossat. After dinner on their first night, according to Crowley's diary, they went out on the town to 'a wicked place, where I profoundly regret to be obliged to confess, my comrade displayed unequivocal symptoms of bawdiness. My duty to his poor mother and uncles, as well as my own moral sense, compelled me to repress this terrible lust for carnal copulation with words severe indeed – but not unjust. I stayed, myself, with an Arab wench.'

Yet more happened in Aumale than Neuburg getting carried

away in a den of iniquity. It was here that Crowley heard a voice urging him to go forth into the desert. It was the same voice as had dictated *The Book of the Law* in Cairo in 1904. Furthermore, it made him realise he had to carry on the magical work he had left off in Mexico in 1900, concerning the Nineteen Keys (or Calls).

Sometimes called Keyes, these were incantations discovered by 'Sir' Edward Kelley and John Dee, Queen Elizabeth I's astrologer, both men having been important magicians. Dee was a mathematician and alchemist who had chosen the auspicious date for Elizabeth's coronation; Kelley was a magician and medium who used a 'shew-stone' (or crystal ball) to make prophecies and communicate with spirits. It was through this that he received the Keys by dictation (backwards, to avoid the power that could be raised otherwise) from several spirits speaking in Enochian, the language of angels. Of the Nineteen Keys, two raised 'the element of Spirit', sixteen evoked the four elements while the last called forth any of the Thirty Æthyrs, spiritual substances finer than matter and also known as Aires.

The Nineteen Keys were highly significant to Golden Dawn rituals, and Crowley had studied them with Mathers and, later, looked at Dee's and Kelley's manuscripts in the British Museum and the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford. When in Mexico, he had raised the visions of the 29th and 30th Æthyrs but had been unable to go on because he was too inexperienced in magic: but now he was an adept and could continue. He also had with him his notes and a copy of John Dee's *Keys for the Thirty Æthyrs* which the alchemist had copied down as Kelley had received them.

Acting upon the voice's order, Crowley and Neuburg headed south into the desert. Crowley was to perform the rituals while Neuburg, as his magical secretary-cum-scribe, was to record all he said and note what happened. Finding a remote spot where they were not likely to be observed, Crowley took his cross in hand and, using the topaz as his own 'shew stone', went into a trance, saw visions and uttered what words he received. Neuburg devotedly wrote it all down.

From Aumale, they travelled south for about sixty miles

to Bou Saâda, going on foot and by horse-drawn carriage, arriving five days later on 27 November. When he set eyes on the town, Crowley considered it one of the most beautiful places he had ever visited. Famous as a destination for artists, it was an isolated oasis settlement of whitewashed houses and palm trees surrounded by cactus hedged gardens and almond orchards, irrigated by a river running through a ravine from the hills to the south.

On the route to Bou Saâda, they conjured up more of the Æthyrs, and Crowley saw more, mostly insubstantial, visions. The results of these and the other invocations were collected in a diary, later published as a volume entitled *The Vision and the Voice*, and it is interesting to see what it was Crowley received while in one of his trances.

An example is the 1,500-word report Neuburg wrote in Bou Saâda on 30 November, for the 19th Æthyr, which was named POP. Extracts from it indicate what Crowley and Neuburg experienced:

> *At first there is a black web over the face of the stone (the topaz* [Crowley's topaz shew-stone] *in the cross) A ray of light pierces it from behind and above Then cometh a black cross, reaching across the whole stone, then a golden cross, not so large The golden cross has become a little narrow door, and an old man like 'The Hermit' of the Taro has opened it and come out The little gate is guarded by a great green dragon And now the whole wall is suddenly fallen away; there is a blaze of the chariots and the horsemen a furious battle is raging* [The Angel of the Æthyr then appears and kisses Crowley and holds a dialogue with him. At length, she picks him up] *as a mother catches her babe, and holds me up in her left arm, and sets my lips to her breast And upon her breast is written Rosa Mundi est Lilium Coeli. And I look down upon the open Book of the mysteries, and it is open at the page on which is the Holy Table with the twelve squares in the midst. It radiates a blaze of light, too dazzling to make out the characters and a voice says Num hæc piscis Omnium* [A sort of footnote follows which was a part of the dictation.] *(To interpret*

that, we must think of ΙχΘυς *which does not conceal Iesous Christos Theou Uios Soter as traditionally asserted but is a mystery of the letter nun and the letter qoph as may be seen by adding it up* ΙχΘύς *is only connected with Christianity because it was a hieroglyph of syphilis which the Romans supposed to have been brought from Syria, and it seems to have been confounded with leprosy, which also they thought was caused by fish-eating. One important meaning of* 'ΙχΘυς *it is formed of the initials of five Egyptian deities and also of five Greek deities in both cases a magic formula of tremendous power is concealed.* [Finally,] *there is a sudden and tremendous shout, absolutely stunning, cold and brutal. Osiris was a black god! And the Æthyr claps its hands, greater than the peal of a thousand mighty thunders. I am back.*

When Crowley was in full spate, Neuburg the scribe had to scribble frantically to keep up.

Whatever one's attitude might be towards Crowley's magic – believer or sceptic – and whether one considers these visions to be truly supernatural or just drug-induced visions, the imagery is interesting and gives an insight into Crowley's psychology. The language is biblical, as are some of the references. For all his fighting against his parents' religion, it was still lodged firmly in his psyche: it was as if he were still trying to purge himself of it, still seeking to sin against it but still held by its influence, or under its power.

Making an excursion from Bou Saâda on 3 December, Crowley and Neuburg struck out for a nearby mountain, Da'leh Addin, where the 14th Æthyr was summoned up. As they were about to set off back to Bou Saâda, Crowley again received a command ordering them to perform a ceremony there on the summit. They formed a circle of stones and an altar of some sort – probably a larger stone – upon which Crowley sacrificed himself. He did not describe the sacrifice in his diary save to say it concerned 'things of which it is unlawful to speak openly under penalty of the most dreadful punishment.' What actually happened was that Crowley knelt on all fours across the stone and Neuburg ritually buggered him.

It must have been a bizarre homosexual coupling. Under the baking desert sun, Crowley, his body somewhat going to fat since he had stopped mountaineering and his head bald, was being mounted by a man who looked like a puckish demon.

This sex act gave new direction to Crowley's life. Until this point, sex and the occult had been separated in his mind. Sex was of the flesh; magic was of the spirit. Yet now, he saw, there was a correlation between them. It was the start of Crowley's awareness of the potential of sex as an adjunct of magic.

Back in Bou Saâda, Crowley felt himself changed. He now considered himself to have been initiated as a Master. Through the 14th and 15th Æthyrs, he was fully installed as a Secret Chief. It was incontrovertible.

The 10th Æthyr, invoked on the afternoon of 6 December, was the trickiest and most dangerous. The Æthyr was sentinelled by a terrible demon called Choronzon, also known as the Dweller in the Abyss.

The invocation took place in a hollow in the dunes outside Bou Saâda. Crowley drew a circle in the sand in which Neuberg was ordered to sit for his own safety. In a triangle, Crowley wrote Choronzon's name and sacrificed three pigeons, one at each point of the triangle. Crowley then stepped into the triangle wearing a black cloak and deep hood. To enter the triangle was extremely risky. The demon could inhabit and take over anyone inside it. After further ritualistic activities, Choronzon materialised as a snake with a human head. Neuburg saw it attempt to seduce Crowley while disguised as a woman he had fallen in love with in Paris, most probably Euphemia Lamb. All the while Crowley was fighting off these demonic advances, Neuburg was writing all it said in frantic shorthand. Choronzon swore at Neuburg, threw sand in his face and then covered over a part of the protective circle. With this breach in Neuburg's security, it flung itself upon him, a naked man trying to tear his throat out. Neuburg yelled and struck out with a magical dagger. Choronzon leapt back into the triangle and Neuburg hastily redrew the circle. The ritual ended. When it was over, Crowley said he had felt Choronzon astrally within him.

What seems most likely to have happened was that Neuburg was high on some drug Crowley had given him – and had probably taken himself – and was actually attacked by Crowley, disencumbered of his hooded cloak. Or the demon had materialised through Crowley, who had acted as its physical medium. Whatever the case, the experience was to haunt Neuburg for the rest of his life and convinced him of Crowley's magical power.

The next day, the desert adventure continued. Hiring two camels and the services of a cameleer called Mohammed bil-Hadj Ba'shir, they headed east-south-east across the desert for Biskra, sixty five miles away, by way of Tolga. The journey took a week. Once arrived in Biskra, and settled into the Hotel Royale, they invoked the last four Æthyrs and the magical process was complete. It had been, Crowley was later to consider, one of the three greatest achievements of his magical life, *The Book of the Law* and the Abramelin Operation being the others. It shaped his entire future thinking and, although he did not know it at the time, sealed his fate.

From Biskra, Crowley sent a long letter to J.F.C. Fuller on 18 December, Neuburg taking it down by dictation. Despite Neuburg writing it, Crowley both mocked and praised him in it and, after some outlining of preparations for the next edition of *The Equinox*, added a rather damning comment on his neophyte secretary. 'I have [Crowley dictated] had an awful job keeping him [Neuburg] off these Arab boys. He has a frightful lust for brown bottoms, because when he was at school he was kicked by a man with brown boots; and being a masochist as well as a pæderast, that accounts for it.'

It is clear from this that the bisexual Neuburg had found the laissez faire Arab attitude towards homosexuality too much of a temptation and had made the most, both at Aumale and possibly elsewhere, of indulging his sexual predilections. On 30 November, Crowley wrote a limerick about Neuburg which was far from flattering and suggested that he was enjoying his sexual liberation:

Y avait un jeun' homme d'Aumale,
Qui dit: Tenez, moi qui vous parle
L'ai gros comme un ranceau:
J'ai baisé un chameau –
Tant pis! J'ai attrapé le gale

A rough translation reads:

There was a young man from Aumale
Who said: Hey! I who am speaking
Have 'it' as big as a cane:
I fucked a camel –
Too bad! I caught the clap.

The letter to Fuller pulled no punches. In places, it was downright obscene. Fuller took considerable umbrage at receiving it. Had the letter been opened, or fallen open, it could have led to a prosecution for obscenity and Fuller, who was not homosexual, could have been in serious trouble. His military career would certainly have been ruined.

Leaving Algiers on 31 December 1909, Crowley and Neuburg returned to London. Crowley's divorce was through: but the law courts were not through with Crowley. In a quite bizarre legal fashion, *The Equinox* was being sued for breach of copyright.

The second issue of the magazine had included a long article on the secret Golden Dawn rituals over which Mathers, who now called himself the Comte Liddell MacGregor, claimed copyright because he had written them. Notice that future issues would continue to outline other Golden Dawn secrets further alarmed him. Mathers sought to obtain an injunction and Crowley was served with a writ.

The judge hearing the application, Mr Justice Buckmill, granted a temporary injunction. Crowley appealed. On 21 March, the appeal was heard by three law lords. Both Crowley and Mathers attended the hearing, the former with his shaved head, the latter with long, grey, flowing locks. Mathers' counsel, Sir Frederick Lawrence, whose fee had been paid by a whip-round among Mathers' supporters, argued that Crowley had broken

his oath of secrecy by publishing the material. The law lords found for Crowley and awarded him costs on the grounds that Mathers had waited until the next issue of the magazine was about to appear before taking action, and that the publication could do neither him nor his reputation harm.

With this, Mathers was done with Crowley. According to his former disciple, Mathers 'published nothing new' and lived the rest of his life 'in sodden intoxication till death put an end to his long misery.' When he died in 1918, a victim of the post-war influenza pandemic, there were those who said he had been magically killed by Crowley.

The national press was quick to latch on to the curious court case. Suddenly, secret societies were the focus of attention, and Crowley's name gained common currency. He was, finally, famous. Yet one publication above all others was to have a lasting impact upon his life.

John Bull was a magazine founded and run by Horatio Bottomley, a wealthy Liberal Member of Parliament. The issue of 2 April carried a brief open letter to Crowley which mocked, 'Congratulations on the result of your appeal. It is rather nice to have lawsuits about Rosicrucian mysteries in the prosaic twentieth century. Incidentally, there is also a fine advertisement for your periodical. Meanwhile, I wish you would teach me to become invisible, to turn my enemy into a black dog, and to discover the buried treasure of the Djinn.'

It was plain to see that Bottomley had him in his sights, but Crowley thought little of it. Here was fame. His notoriety, slight until now, was increased manyfold by the press coverage of the legal appeal, every criticism, every challenge boosting Crowley's ego and advertising his Great Work. The Secret Chiefs could not have arranged better publicity themselves.

Had he been more artful, or less blinded by his own self-importance, Crowley could have used this publicity to good effect. He could have manipulated the press for his and the Secret Chiefs' own ends, yet he did not. He just played along, allowing his rebellion to speak for him, not curbing or controlling his eccentricities, offbeat humour and outrageousness, which

often led to him being taken the wrong way, misunderstood, misrepresented and, consequently, attacked.

An example of how Crowley misjudged press and public opinion, to his detriment, can be seen in his essay 'The Synagogue of Satan', contained in a collection of essays entitled *Konx Om Pax*, which had been published in 1907. The title was ironic. Crowley thought it amusing. Others did not. His attempts to address what he saw as social and political problems of the times were ignored. Crowley was being perceived as a worshipper of Satan. He was not. Other writings increased his nefariousness. Much later, Crowley was to write that a 'male child of perfect innocence and high intelligence is the most satisfactory and suitable victim' for sacrifice. His detractors jumped on this: Crowley was in favour of human sacrifice. This was, of course, rubbish. Crowley's further statement that he had done this hundreds of times annually from 1912 to 1926 added fuel to the flames of controversy. That this was 'the sacrifice of oneself spiritually. And the intelligence and innocence of that male child are the perfect understanding of the Magician, his one aim, without lust of result. And male he must be, because what he sacrifices is not the material blood, but his creative power' was ignored. Only the literal interpretation made good newspaper copy. That said, the press might have had just as much fun with real interpretations of some of Crowley's utterances, which obliquely referred to magical, often homosexual, sex. If anything, the press did Crowley a service by concentrating on the smokescreen of the outlandish and ignoring, through ignorance, the more salacious and potentially harmful. This was not Crowley's intention: the smokescreen was purely fortuitous and not planned by him.

He also continued to publish spoofs. In 1909, he anonymously submitted a collection of allegedly religious poetry to the Catholic publishers Burns & Oates. The editor, Wilfred Meynell, was well and truly conned, failing to see the lesbian inferences in the poetry, publishing them under the title *Amphora*. One of the poems, which Crowley omitted from the manuscript but which he included in a private limited edition of the book he personally produced, contained one of his codes: the

initial letters of the lines spelt 'The Virgin Mary I desire but arseholes set my prick on fire.' In 1912, Crowley owned up to the authorship, bringing the poems out in a collection entitled *Hail Mary*.

The spring of 1910 introduced a new woman into Crowley's life. Born in 1880, she was an Australian violinist called Leila Ida Nerissa Bathurst Waddell, whom Crowley had met, probably, in Paris. On being inducted into the A∴A∴ in April, she took the name Soror Agatha and became Crowley's mistress. Within days of their first tryst, Crowley wrote two stories about her, 'The Vixen' and 'The Violinist'. A very pretty woman, she captivated Crowley with her beauty and her violin playing. This was nowhere near professional musician standard but, according to Crowley, who believed his genius could improve others' latent talents, it was much improved under his tutelage. Their relationship was very ardent, but she was not, as some would claim, Crowley's next Scarlet Woman: she lacked the necessary clairvoyant abilities. Nevertheless, Leila Waddell became an important part of his magical work, despite the fact that Crowley was annoyed by her Australian accent, which he wished she would lose, as it did not sound well in ceremonies.

The following month, Crowley, Neuburg and Leila were invited to stay as the guests of a Royal Naval officer, Commander G.M. Marston, at his house in Dorset. Marston, a senior officer in the Admiralty, was a probationer in the A∴A∴. On 9 May, they evoked a spirit called Bartzabel. The ceremony, involving Crowley's incantation, Leila's violin playing and Neuburg's dancing, so impressed Marston that he mooted their putting it on as a public exhibition. He was apparently aware of the potential influence of primitive music: according to Francis King, the well-known writer on the occult, he had conducted experiments with a tom-tom upon married women. The rhythms of the drum had allegedly induced unrest followed by increased sexual awareness culminating in masturbation or 'indecent' behaviour.

Crowley's current experimentation centred upon an hallucinogenic drug called anhalonium, more commonly known today as peyote. He had first come across it in Mexico, where it

was derived from a cactus of the genus *Lophophora*, and he was almost certainly the first person to bring it to Europe. Its effects heightened the perception of colour, confused the sense of place and time and made everyday objects appear marvellous. In March 1907, he had tentatively tried taking a dose, and intermittently kept up his investigations into his reactions to it and visions received as supplies became available to him.

After leaving Marston's house party, Crowley went to Venice where, on the 18th, he took anhalonium and saw 'a faery flush of yellow and red over Venice on closing eyes.' At the same time, he picked up a man with whom he had sex, Crowley taking the passive role and discovering his feminine side, which he called Alys. Returning to England, he and Leila started to take doses of anhalonium to see how the drug affected a variety of rituals developed in Dorset in which Crowley recited as she bowed her violin: 'When LW and I played and read poetry against each other before the Lord, we got such wonderful spiritual results that we tried to reduce all to a rule.' Consequently, Crowley set to writing seven rites, one for each planet. He called them the Rites of Eleusis.

In these rites, Neuburg danced until he was possessed by the relevant spirit. Leila played. Crowley intoned explanatory verses he wrote with George Raffalovitch. They designed costumes for the rites and planned their performance, as Marston had suggested. With every nuance perfected to Crowley's satisfaction, the rites were performed in public in the A∴A∴ headquarters at 124 Victoria Street, with an audience paying to attend them. Crowley was encouraged by their success, both magically and financially.

Several descriptions of these ceremonies exist to allow one to piece together the scene at a performance. The most detailed was given by a reporter for the *Daily Sketch*, Raymond Radclyffe, whose article, published on 24 August 1910, read:

> *I attended at the offices of the Equinox. I climbed the interminable stairs. I was received by a gentleman robed in white and carrying a drawn sword.*

The room was dark, only a dull-red light shone upon an altar. Various young men picturesquely clad in robes of white, red, or black, stood at different points round the room. Some held swords. The incense made a haze, through which I saw a small white statue, illuminated by a tiny lamp hung high on the cornice.

A brother recited 'the banishing ritual of the Pentagram impressively and with due earnestness. Another brother was commanded to 'purify the Temple with water.' This was done. Then we witnessed the 'Consecration of the Temple with Fire,' whereupon Crowley, habited in black, and accompanied by the brethren, led 'the Mystic Circumambulation.' They walked round the altar twice or thrice in a sort of religious procession. Gradually, one by one, those of the company who were mere onlookers were beckoned into the circle. The Master of the Ceremonies then ordered a brother to 'bear the Cup of Libation.' The brother went round the room, offering each a large golden bowl full of some pleasant-smelling drink. [It contained a mild dose of opiates and anhalonium dissolved in fruit juice.] *We drank in turn. This over, a stalwart brother strode into the centre and proclaimed 'The Twelvefold Certitude of God.' Artemis was then invoked by the greater ritual of the Hexagram. More Libation. Aleister Crowley read us the Song of Orpheus from the Argonauts.*

Following upon this song we drank our third Libation, and then the brothers led into the room a draped figure, masked in that curious blue tint we mentally associated with Hecate. The lady, for it was a lady, was enthroned on a seat high above Crowley himself. By this time the ceremony had grown weird and impressive, and its influence was increased when the poet recited in solemn and reverent voice Swinburne's glorious first chorus from 'Atalanta' that begins 'When the hounds of Spring.' Again a Libation; again an invocation to Artemis. After further ceremonies, Frater Omnia Vincam [Neuburg] *was commanded to dance the dance of Syrinx and Pan in honour of our lady Artemis.' A young poet, whose verse is often read, astonished me by a graceful and beautiful dance, which he continued until he fell exhausted in the middle of the room, where, by the way, he lay until the end. Crowley then made supplication to the goddess in*

a beautiful and unpublished poem A dead silence ensued After a long pause, the figure enthroned took a violin and played – played with passion and feeling, like a master. We were thrilled to our very bones Once again the figure took the violin and played an Abend Lied so beautifully, so gracefully, and with such intense feeling that in very deed most of us experienced that Ecstasy which Crowley so earnestly seeks Then came a prolonged and intense silence, after which the Master of the Ceremonies dismissed us in these words 'By the Powers in me vested I declare the Temple closed.' So ended a really beautiful ceremony – beautifully conceived and beautifully carried out If there is any higher form of artistic expression than great verse and great music, I have yet to learn it.

Spurred on by his success, Crowley decided to seek a bigger audience and booked a dimly lit private room at the Caxton Hall in Westminster. One hundred tickets were sold for each performance, a season ticket for all seven rites costing an exorbitant five guineas. Members of the audience, who sat on stools, were told to dress in appropriate colours according to each rite, performed to near-packed houses on consecutive Wednesdays through October and November 1910. The press was invited and feature articles were soon appearing. Among the public and journalists in the audience were several officers from the Metropolitan Police, hoping to see what impropriety might occur. They were disappointed. All they espied were mildly blasphemous playlets dedicated 'in honour of our lady Artemis', in which the various spirits of the planets were asked to solve the riddle of the universe, failed and passed the responsibility on to the god Pan, who obliged.

For the Caxton Hall events, other performers were brought in, including a young and neurotic actress going under the stage name of Ione de Forest. Pale-skinned, with a round face and waist length black hair, her real name was Jeanne Heyse; on account of her natural pallor, she played the moon in the lunar rite Neuburg fell in love with her and they had a passionate affair. Crowley disapproved: the relationship faltered. She later

married but, after a few months, killed herself in 1912. Neuburg, who was never to get over her loss, thought Crowley had magically murdered her.

In general, the press was mildly curious about these performances, bordering on the somewhat scornful: one article announced, one 'of the latest fads among the "would be-weirds" is to perform strange antics from the Rites of Jupiter.' One publication, however, was not content with mere cynicism. *The Looking Glass* launched an all out attack, describing the ritual poetry as gibberish, Crowley as a seditious blasphemer, and hinting at sexual mischief, backing this claim up with details of a photo of Leila kneeling on Crowley's chest.

The Caxton Hall performances over, Crowley went away on 10 December for a brief holiday. The following Saturday edition of *The Looking Glass* smugly reported, 'We understand that Mr Aleister Crowley has left London for Russia. This should do much to mitigate the rigour of the St Petersburg winter. We have to congratulate ourselves on having temporarily extinguished one of the most blasphemous and cold-blooded villains of modern times. But why were Scotland Yard about to let him depart in peace?' It was followed by a feature-length exposé which set the seal on Crowley's evergreen reputation as a scoundrel.

Crowley was both annoyed and taken aback. He had naively believed the press to have been somehow unbiased but, first with Horatio Bottomley and, now, with De Wend Fenton, the editor of *The Looking Glass*, he knew otherwise. He also now appreciated that some newspapers relied for survival not only on sales and advertising but on blackmail. For a fee, an inflammatory article could be editorially spiked.

Bottomley was not out to hold Crowley to ransom, despite a good deal of published invective, but De Wend Fenton was, and he hinted there would be more scurrilous revelations to follow.

Far from going to St Petersburg, Crowley and Neuburg returned to Algeria, driving to Bou Saâda to save time. Hiring a camel driver, two camels and a young boy as a general factotum, they went out into the desert once more. Crowley found camels

more amenable than horses. They acted like 'highly placed officials and even – if scabby – like consuls, and look (when old) like English ladies engaged in good works.' And, although he generally hated empty wastes, he loved the desert, which imperceptibly suggested to him not 'vacancy and barrenness, but rather of some subtle and secret spring of life.' Yet there was more to North Africa than this. Here, he need not worry about his homosexuality. It was accepted, and he was accepted despite it.

Although Crowley was back in a land he loved, the start of their journey augured ill. The magic they performed was unsuccessful, the camel-driver and boy whinged incessantly, and they were caught in a freak rainstorm which left the desert covered in six inches of water and capped the distant mountains with snow. Regardless, Crowley pushed on into the empty desert, finding only scattered, meagre settlements in one of which, Ouled Djellal, they stumbled upon a 'hovel which calls itself an European hotel, kept by a strayed Frenchman. The village boasts a barn where one can go every night and watch dancing girls I need not describe their doings, but I may say that this is the only form of amusement that I have ever found of which I never get tired. I like to drop in pretty early and sit there all through the night, smoking tobacco, or kif [cannabis], and drinking coffee, cup after cup.'

From Ouled Djellal, Crowley and Neuburg seemed just to wander, often being forced to stretch the pace to reach water. Crowley was in his element. This kind of travel appealed to his adventurous spirit. The trip ended, however, on a sour note. Crowley bluntly records in his autobiography, 'I left Neuburg in Biskra to recuperate and returned to England alone.' Neuburg later claimed that Crowley abandoned him.

After a brief stopover in Paris, Crowley went to Eastbourne before travelling to London. Why he went to the town is not made clear, but the conjecture is that he went to see his mother again. Perhaps he was currying favour in order to gain an inheritance or, perhaps, and it would not have been

out of character, he went there simply to torment the old woman with his evil doings; or he might, as he grew older, have harboured an affection for her of which he did not want others to be aware.

It was not long before he was the tormented. In his absence, *The Looking Glass* had been having a field day. They had dug up everything they could from Crowley's past that they might put a bad spin to, including his recent divorce and adultery. Fuller was all for suing for libel. Crowley disagreed. He saw no point to it. The publication was nearly bankrupt, the readership consisted of ignoramuses, and history, Crowley averred, would do for it. Besides, he claimed, he was too busy with *The Equinox*, although he did write two pieces for *The Bystander*, in which he explained what the Rites of Eleusis were all about.

Things took a turn, however, when *The Looking Glass* began besmirching Crowley's friends. Allan Bennett was accused of being a 'rascally sham Buddhist monk' with the added innuendo that they had conducted 'unmentionable immoralities' together: in the sub-speak of the day, this signified homosexual union. George Cecil Jones was, by inference, a party to this. Bennett, far away in the Orient, could not be harmed by these allegations, but for Jones it was a different matter. He decided to sue.

When the case came before the courts in April 1911, the defending barristers' argument was that, as Jones had no reputation to lose and the statement mentioning him was ambiguous, there was no case to answer. The judge was bemused by the background to the supposed libel, and the evidence more than once brought titters of laughter from court officials and the public benches alike.

Crowley, who was present throughout the two-day case, enjoyed it all hugely as the *éminence grise* sitting in the public gallery. He was not called to the witness box but, nevertheless, all eyes frequently strayed in his direction, especially to see his reaction when the counsel for the publishers, 'an admirably adroit and aggressive advocate of the uncompromising, overbearing type', referred to him as a 'loathsome and abominable creature.'

Crowley did not flinch. When his literary trick of hiding words in initial letters was explained, and a few examples given of the indecencies these produced (such as 'piss', 'cunt', 'arse' and 'quim'), Crowley merely smiled, claiming to interested parties that they were mere coincidences. Even the appearance of Crowley's enemy, Mathers, called to prove Crowley's moral turpitude, did not faze him, the court coming to see Mathers, thanks to Jones's barrister, as more of a curiosity than a viable witness. When Dr Edward Berridge appeared on the stand, he stated that he had heard rumours about Crowley but was unwilling to divulge these as there were ladies present: the judge, much to Crowley's amusement, remarked that any ladies present were most likely beyond being shocked.

On several occasions, the judge suggested that Crowley might take the stand to explain a point, but both the defendant's and plaintiff's barristers evaded the proposition. *The Looking Glass* lawyer was afraid that Crowley might show that the remarks aimed at Jones were really part of a blackmail attempt, while Jones's attorney was afraid of what Crowley, with little regard for convention, might say with deleterious effect upon the case he was making. Crowley, though he did not show it in court, was not a little reluctant to be a witness. He would have enjoyed the theatricality of the trial but he did not want his private life hung out for all to see, especially his bisexuality.

The judge summed up the case by declaring that Jones had sworn innocence while *The Looking Glass* swore it had never intended harm, but added that Crowley had published lewd material. The core of the matter now rested in the jury deciding to what extent Jones had been shown to be identified with Crowley's character and conduct. He posed them three questions. Were the words and statements complained of defamatory of the plaintiff? If yes, were the statements substantially true? If yes again, were they fair? The upshot was an affirmative in each instance, and the jury found for De Wend Fenton and his publication. In effect, Jones was libelled merely because of his association with Crowley.

The trial prompted Crowley to write an acerbic pamphlet entitled *The Rosicrucian Scandal*, published under the pseudonym of Leo Vincey. Although it had been De Wend Fenton who had primarily caused all the trouble, Mathers was the butt of Crowley's hatred in the publication. It commenced by stating it was 'The Cross-Examination of Samuel Sidney Sylvester Scherzerade Socrates Scipio Simmons Scrutton Shacaback Swank Swizzle Liddell Diddell MacGregor MacKerrow Mathers, James IV of Scotland, Comte de St Germain, Earl of Glenstrae, Comte MacGregor, Chevalier MacGregor, MacGregor Mathers, S'Rhiogail mo Dhream, Deo Duce Comite Ferro, Chevalier of the Order of St Germain, etc., etc., by Mr Q. Scorpio, one of His Majesty's Counsel learned in the Law.' This parody was not far from the truth: Mathers had given his name to the court as MacGregor Mathers but Jones's barrister had drawn him out on this until he agreed he was also known as Count MacGregor of Glenstrae and believed King James IV of Scotland had never died. In the pamphlet, Crowley pointed out that there was a rude anagram in the judge's name: later, he explained it – Scrutton could spell cunts rot. His revenge on Berridge had to wait until Crowley wrote his novel, *Moonchild*, in which the doctor forms the basis for a character called Balloch.

Although Crowley was not essentially involved in the trial, it had an adverse effect upon him. Fuller ended their friendship, for he considered that Crowley had let Jones down. Raffalovitch also distanced himself and drifted away, although there was already a rift between them before the libel case arose. Fewer people sought to join the A∴A∴.

Fuller's leaving was due to more than Crowley's perceived cowardice in not supporting their mutual friend. Crowley had made fun of Fuller in a poem called 'The Convert', included in a collection entitled *The Winged Beetle*, published in 1910. In *The World's Tragedy*, published the same year, Crowley added salt to the wound by saying that any criticism of the work would be best left to Fuller 'that he might bye-and-bye edify the public in a little monograph of say 350,000 words', as he had done with his effusive prize-winning essay.

True to character, Crowley saw the situation differently. Fuller, he said, was bottling out. Fuller wanted nothing more to do with *The Equinox* and would carry on with writing *The Temple of Solomon the King* only if Crowley gave up all editorial participation in it. He also – or so Crowley had it – refused to allow Crowley to mention his name in association with his own, on penalty of paying £100 every time he did so. This was hurtful to Crowley, who considered he had made Fuller's literary reputation: after their friendship ended, Crowley claimed that Fuller did nothing more but win prizes for competitions organised by the Army Council. In truth, Fuller went on to become a major-general in the Royal Tank Corps and the author of several important books on military history. He was a brilliant military strategist, and it was he who formulated the offensive tactics for tank battles, used to such devastating effect in the British victory at Cambrai in 1917. The British Army subsequently ignored his tactical ideas, but the German Army learned from them: Fuller was the architect of what became known as the *Blitzkrieg*. So influential was his strategy upon the military thinking of the Third Reich that he was also to be one of only two Englishmen invited to Hitler's fiftieth birthday celebrations in 1939, just before the outbreak of the Second World War. By this time, Fuller had resigned his commission in disgust at the intransigence of the British Army with regard to his tactical planning. He dedicated his life to being a military historian, his only flaw being his admiration for fascism: he was an active member of Sir Oswald Mosley's British Union of Fascists.

This departure of his close friends set a pattern for the remainder of Crowley's life. He would make a friend but, in time, would lose them as a result of his paranoia, arrogance, egotism or a simple inability to appreciate the mechanics of friendship. Either he would dismiss them or they would go of their own accord, disillusioned with him, their initial devotion rejected.

It might be said that Crowley never really wanted friends, just lovers and disciples who made no demands upon him. He denied this, declaring, 'I admit that my visions can never mean to other men as much as they do to me. I do not regret this. All I ask

is that my results should convince seekers after truth that there is beyond doubt something worth while seeking, attainable by methods more or less like mine. I do not want to tather a flock, to be the fetish of fools and fanatics, or the founder of a faith whose followers are content to echo my opinions. I want each man to cut his own way through the jungle.' Yet the opposite was true. Crowley wanted – even needed – adoring, unquestioning followers. He considered himself a man apart from other men, a 'Spirit of Solitude, the Wanderer in the Wilderness. I had no business to take part in the affairs of men by personal contact with them in their sheep folds, monkey houses and pigsties. My sole link with them was to guide such as adventured themselves into the desert.' He was, after all, a Secret Chief with magical work to do and a reputation building.

13

Enter Mary, Exit Victor and the Paris Working

The March edition of *The Equinox* having been put to bed, Crowley decided it was time he went on a magical retirement, and so, in the early summer of 1911, he and Leila Waddell stayed in a house at Montigny-sur-Loing on the edge of the Forest of Fontainebleau. Settled there, Crowley found that his muse had returned. His literary production was suddenly prodigious, including the short stories 'Across the Gulf', 'The Woodcutter' and 'His Secret Sin', a number of poems – among them a birthday poem for Leila, who professed to be twenty-six on 10 August, but was actually thirty one – and two plays, *The Ghouls* and the comedic *Mortadello* or *The Angel of Venice*. Some of this work was published commercially, without Crowley subsidising it.

However, not all his output was literary. He wrote nineteen books of a magical or mystical nature during this, as he put it, 'astounding summer', much of it appearing in *The Equinox*, including a recounting of how he had come to write *The Book of the Law*.

No matter how creative his summer had been, the autumn was to bring him a new discovery. It was his next Scarlet Woman.

Their meeting happened in a roundabout way. In Paris, Crowley had met up with Nina Olivier, whose current lover was (as Crowley described him) 'an unpleasant and cadaverous hypocrite' of a pianist called Heber Skene, who played for Isadora Duncan when she performed her 'liberated' dances. Back in London on 11 October, Crowley dined with the pianist at the Savoy, after which they went off to one of Duncan's famously

exotic parties. One of the guests was a friend of Duncan's, a pretty dark-haired woman called Mary d'Este Sturges.

As usual, Crowley was smitten by her. He wrote, 'This lady, a magnificent specimen of mingled Irish and Italian blood, possessed a most powerful personality and a terrific magnetism which instantly attracted my own. I forgot everything. I sat on the floor like a Chinese god, exchanging electricity with her.' Despite her magnetism, which never failed to attract men like ants to sugar, she was not all she seemed. She was born Mary Dempsey in Quebec in 1871, but upon her father's early death the now impoverished family moved to Chicago. At twenty-six, Mary married Edmund Biden, by whom she had a son, Preston. The marriage did not last long and, in 1901, she moved to Paris and was befriended by Isadora Duncan. She then married a Chicago stockbroker, Solomon Sturges, who adopted her son and brought her wealth for the first time. Romantic, flirtatious and flighty, Mary used her wealth to travel and changed her name by adding d'Este to it, claiming she was of Italian descent and that this was the Italianate version of her maiden name. Divorcing Sturges, she founded a perfume company in Paris, calling it Maison d'Este until members of the real (and noble) Italian d'Este family threatened to sue her. At this point, she altered the name to Desti. Her son, Preston Sturges, whom Crowley called 'a most god-forsaken lout', was later to become a famous Oscar-winning film director. His opinion of Crowley was somewhat more considered.

> *One of Mr Crowley's little characteristics* [Sturges remembered] *that I particularly loathed was his haircut, an unpleasing variation on that nauseating style popular with the very young set some years ago known as the Iroquois. Like some early Yul Brynner Mr Crowley had his entire skull shaved except for one small tufted square in the exact middle of his cranium. On this lawn, or village green, he promenaded his fingers as if they were dogs one had taken out to water.* [In retrospect, he later surmised,] *Reading about some of his subsequent exploits, I realize that my mother and I were lucky*

to escape with our lives. If I had been a little older, he might not have escaped with his.

He was thirteen when he knew Crowley.

At the end of October, Crowley returned to Paris, visited Mary's apartment and swept her off, as he put it, to go skating in Switzerland. Booking into the National Hotel in Zurich, they embarked upon an alcohol, sex and drugs binge which culminated, on the night of 21 November, in Mary losing her mind. She ranted and raved and hallucinated for some time but, after an hour, Crowley started to see some sense emerging from her visions, which seem to have been induced by anhalonium. As she had no knowledge of magic whatsoever, he interpreted this as a signal that a spirit was trying to communicate with him through her. When she used the word 'Perdurabo', which she could not have known, he was convinced: or, more exactly, he convinced himself that Mary was his new Scarlet Woman. Leila, who was still in his life and mind, was creative and sensitive, but Mary was clearly clairvoyant. Their relationship had followed the pattern common with Crowley. Physical attraction led to sexual encounter which developed into something magical.

The next day, they moved on to the Palace Hotel in St Moritz. Here, Crowley saw another sign that Mary was his new magical partner. Unpacking her case, Crowley was astounded to discover that she possessed a blue robe exactly like that he had bought for Rose for their trip to the pyramids. This, he was certain, proved that the Secret Chiefs intended her to be his next Scarlet Woman.

On the evening of 28 November, Crowley rearranged the furniture in the sitting room of their hotel suite into a temple, produced his magical equipment, with which he always travelled, including his topaz-mounted cross and a wand of ebony set with the star sapphire, got Mary drunk, plied her with drugs and had a long session of sex with her to get her receptive to receiving astral visions. At eleven o'clock precisely, one of the Secret Chiefs, named Ab-ul-Diz, arrived.

The session was repeated four times between 4 and 13

December. By now, Mary had had enough of being doped and rogered into a receptive state. Several times, Crowley noted in his magical diary, she begged to be allowed to go home and said she did not want to go on. Crowley persevered. Of the 11 December session, he wrote, Mary was excited by 'half bottle of Pommery 1904, and by Eros', adding as a footnote, 'Previous to the Orgie and Incantations, [Mary] was lying drunk on the sofa; the Eleven [magi] came to her and gave her mystic gifts, one knowledge, another power, another wisdom etc, said it was all for the Cause. They sealed the gifts basiculo ad cunnum.' This translates as 'with a kiss on the cunt'.

Mary was not a good clairvoyant. Crowley was frequently disappointed or infuriated by her, yet he had to continue. Ab ul Diz had instructed him, through her, to write a new magical work which had to be completed in Italy. He also gave Mary the magical name of Virakam.

Ever obedient to the Secret Chiefs, Crowley took Mary south through Italy, searching for a place in which to carry out Ab-ul-Diz's command. This transpired to be a partially restored villa, the Villa Caldarazzo, at Posillipo, near Naples. Off the beaten track, it was just what Crowley (or Ab-ul-Diz) wanted. They rented it and sent for Preston, at boarding school in France, who was to spend his Christmas holidays with them. In adulthood, he remembered the villa with little pleasure. 'Apart from its supernatural features,' he wrote caustically, 'it had little to recommend it. It was cold and damp, few of its windows closed properly, it was completely inaccessible and the plumbing leaked.'

Crowley quickly converted the main room into a temple and set to work dictating his next magical work to Mary, whom he also tutored in what he termed automatic vigilance. This consisted of being careful never to use certain words or phrases. Whenever Mary's vigilance slipped, her son recalled, Crowley 'solemnly withdrew an open penknife from his robe, raised his arm so that the loose sleeve of his robe fell back to expose his bare forearm, and then with the penknife slashed a small fresh slice under the ladder of slices he had already incised

into his forearm, cut by cut, for each time Mother had had a similar lapse of decorum.'

It was not long before Mary tired of being a magical secretary. She and Crowley argued and she left for Paris, taking her son with her. He followed, they made up and returned together to London. Yet the spell was broken, although it seems that Mary continued for a while to aid Crowley in his work for the A∴A∴: the March 1912 edition of *The Equinox* was published as edited by her and Neuburg. Not long after returning to London, Mary married a Turk, Veli Bey, and Crowley was bereft of his second Scarlet Woman, whom he later admitted was perhaps not fully up to the responsibility involved. The marriage soon failed. The Turk, who resoundingly hated and was jealous of her son, beat then deserted her. She rejoined Isadora Duncan's set and died in New York in 1931 of leukaemia. It was her scarf, a gift to Duncan, which caught in the wheel of the open roadster in which the dancer was riding, jerking her head back and fatally snapping her neck.

The magical work Crowley had dictated to Mary was to form a part of one of the books for which he was to become – and remains – famous in magical circles. Entitled *Liber IV* or *Book Four*, parts one and two appeared in 1912 and 1913, priced four groats and four tanners respectively. Part two contained an illustration of a younger and bearded Crowley sitting naked in the sea and captioned in Greek, 'Hail, Saviour of the World'. The third part was dictated to Leila Waddell in the spring of 1912, but Crowley revised it over and over during the next ten years and it was not actually published in final form until 1929. It is commonly known today as *Magick in Theory and Practice*. When the fourth part appeared in 1936, it contained *The Book of the Law* accompanied by an autobiographical preface and a brief comment. All this work appeared in various forms over many years, but it was not until after Crowley's death that it was finally collated and collected in one volume. Entitled *Magick*, it was and remains one of the central canons of magical studies.

It was in this work that Crowley first added a *k* to the word 'magical', which he thereafter used until he died. The addition

was intended to separate his magic from that of conjurors and entertainers, yet it also had an esoteric meaning. It stood for *kteis*, the Greek for vagina. Through magick, Crowley saw the human consciousness as divine and himself raised to the rank of a magus. 'My Grade as a Magus . . . [he wrote] my office as the Logos of the Aeon, the Prophet chosen to proclaim the Law which will determine the destinies of this planet for an epoch, singles me out in a sense, puts me in a class which contains only seven other names in the whole of human history.' These seven companions with whom Crowley claimed association included Mohammed, Moses and Lao Tzu, the founder of Taoism.

With Mary no longer taking an active magical role in his life, Crowley divided his time in the first half of 1912 between Paris and London, writing *The Book of Lies*, which he classified as a compendium of the contents of his consciousness. It was in places humorous, in others an early echo of the avant garde poetry of the 1960s. One section, which had been included in the first issue of *The Equinox*, consisted of a question mark, another an exclamation mark: they were respectively entitled 'The Soldier' and 'The Hunchback'. He also wrote a short story called 'The Testament of Magdalen Blair', based upon an idea Allan Bennett had given him long before. Yet his writing was of secondary importance. What was really occupying Crowley's mind was an organisation called variously the Order of the Oriental Templars, the Order of the Temple of the Orient, the Order of the Templars of the East or the Ordo Templi Orientis. For short, it was (and still is) known as the OTO.

Crowley came to be interested in the OTO through Mathers' appearance at *The Looking Glass* hearing, during which Mathers had claimed he was head of the Rosicrucian Order, much to the chagrin of those who similarly believed they were. That said, Crowley did in fact know of the OTO but had not shown an abiding curiosity in it. However, perceived as Mathers' antagonist, Crowley was contacted by an assortment of sympathetic occultists and freemasons for whom, in general, he had little time. He claimed he had been a Scottish Rite freemason since his initiation in Mexico, but he usually dismissed

freemasonry as 'either vain pretence, tomfoolery, an excuse for drunken rowdiness, or a sinister association for political intrigues and commercial pirates.' Now they wrote to him and, according to Crowley, showered honours upon him until he was 'supposed to know more secret signs, tokens, passwords, grand-words, grips, and so on, than I could learn in a dozen lives. An elephant would break down under the insignia I am entitled to wear.'

This adulation aroused Crowley's interest in freemasonry and he wrote to the Grand Master in London seeking to clarify his position in the movement. He had, he claimed, been initiated as a Master Mason on 17 December 1904, in Anglo-Saxon Lodge 343 (today numbered 103), incorporated under the French masonic constitution in Paris, and wished to know if this meant he was considered a mason in Britain. He was not: the United Grand Lodge in Britain did not then recognise the French Grand Lodge.

There was a further reason for Crowley wanting to know if he was an accepted mason in Britain. It concerned a man called John Yarker, who was a member of the Quatuor Coronati Lodge No. 2076, an important lodge in which masonic research was carried out. Yarker had established an independent masonic Grand Council in Manchester, but this had not been ratified by the Supreme Council in London, which had expelled him for overreaching his masonic bounds. For some reason, Yarker decided that Crowley should be his successor in his breakaway Grand Council, although it is doubtful the two had ever met. After Yarker's death, in 1913, Crowley convened a meeting at which he appointed himself Grand Administrator General of the council but did little else, although he considered he had been unofficially requested by a number of masonic organisations to look into rationalising rituals and rules and redefining freemasonry as, as he put it, a cohesive, coherent and compact system of communicating religious, philosophical, magical and mystical truth. Be that as it may, the official freemasonic organisations do not accept that Crowley was ever a genuine freemason, and he did not consider himself to be a member of mainstream freemasonry.

The OTO, a German organisation, was one of those which had contacted him. At first, Crowley thought of it as he did all the others, but he soon learned it was different, for the OTO, with a leaning towards oriental religion and philosophy, regarded sex as an intrinsic part of magic. Its members believed that sexual ecstasy could lift one to a different plane of consciousness and spirituality. The concept was common in India and China but was generally dismissed by European cultures as eccentric obscenity. This said, the sexual act was not one performed out of lust or love but deliberate and controlled: the followers of such sexual practice required much training in meditation, breathing and other yoga-like disciplines. It was not a licence to free love and unbridled eroticism.

Around 1900, as a part of the rise in awareness of Germany's national roots in Aryan traditions, the OTO was founded by the famous German freemasons Franz Hartmann and Heinrich Klein, and the wealthy Austrian industrialist Karl Kellner, who had travelled extensively in the East. Influenced both by oriental religions and the work of an American occultist, P.B. Randolph, who experimented with hallucinogens, Kellner founded the Hermetic Brotherhood of the Light which, according to modern OTO history, drew upon freemasonry, Rosicrucianism and the Illuminist movements of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the rituals of the Knights Templar, early Gnostic teaching and paganism. In 1902, Kellner and Theodor Reuss, who had recently started publishing an obscure masonic journal entitled *Oriflamme*, decided to establish their brotherhood, concentrating upon sexual magic and using the magazine as a platform. In the foundation of the OTO, Yarker had played an important part, giving Kellner the necessary charter upon which to build with authority.

Theodor (sometimes referred to as Charles) Reuss was an enigmatic fellow. An Anglo-German, he pretended to be a Marxist and was a member of the Socialist League in England until 1884, when he was expelled. In fact, he was an officer in the German secret service, employed to spy upon Karl Marx's

family. While resident in England, he had made a living as a music-hall entertainer.

When Kellner died in 1905, Reuss took over as head of the OTO. It was he who, in not so many words but with strong hints, published the OTO's involvement with sexual magical practices in *Oriflamme*. Under his leadership, the OTO spread rapidly across western Europe and into America, carried there by German immigrants. The membership, which included both men and women, was not initially instructed in sexual magic. Individual members had to reach exalted rank before being given the relevant teaching. Curiously, according to Francis King in *The Magical World of Aleister Crowley*, no one seems to have actually taken part in any sexual magic with the exception of Reuss, and he was only to do it once. All that, of course, was to change when Crowley arrived on the scene.

In 1910, while visiting Britain, Reuss had admitted Crowley into the OTO, although Crowley appears to have had little to do with it until probably 1913, when Reuss paid him a visit in London and, producing a copy of *The Book of Lies*, accused him of revealing in its pages the secrets of the OTO 9th Grade, which concerned sexual magic. Such ambiguous but not sufficiently esoteric lines as 'Let the Adept be armed with his Magick Rood and provided with his Mystic Rose' incensed Reuss. Crowley refuted the allegation. He had arrived at this juncture in his own way and it was only now, he said, that he saw that in which the OTO was engaged. For some time, they talked, exchanging ideas. Reuss explained his concept of sexual alchemy in which female sexual fluids and the elixir of life (semen) were central. Crowley expressed the importance of homosexuality and quoted from his writings in support of it.

The outcome of the meeting was that Reuss and Crowley joined forces and agreed to established a new, British division of the OTO called Mysteria Mystica Maxima (or, for short, MMM). Crowley was to be its leader. He travelled to Berlin, was given the title of Supreme and Holy King of Ireland, Iona and all the Britains within the Sanctuary of the Gnosis and took the

magical name of Baphomet, the same name as one of the idols the Knights Templar were accused of worshipping by their enemies.

Returned to London, Crowley published a manifesto and essentially advertised for initiates. The manifesto was expensively printed, bore a picture of Boleskine and was purportedly written by Leila Waddell as MMM secretary. It promised much. Membership fees were extremely costly: to reach the 9th (sexual magic) degree would cost £103 10s. In addition, there was an annual subscription of thirty-three guineas. Initiates seem not to have been slow in coming forth, but most did not know of the ultimate sexual secret of the Mysteria Mystica Maxima. Had they done so, many might have shied away. For his part, Crowley considered members of the Mysteria Mystica Maxima as being potential members of the A∴A∴ as well.

At the same time, Crowley began rewriting the OTO rituals in order, as he put it, to explain the position of man in the cosmos and offering, he hoped, a basis for a universal religious fraternity. This was to provide all humanity with a sense of destiny, moral direction and intellectual fulfilment gained by the attainment of intellectual and philosophical strength through magical means. He published an essay in *The Equinox* in March 1913 entitled 'Energized Enthusiasm', which contained two basic assumptions, namely that sex was inherently good and promoted genius, especially in males. With the use of wine (or drugs), sex and music, he suggested great things were possible, although the essay did not outline them: well-considered propriety and the obscenity laws prevented Crowley from going so far as to outline his ritualistic sex magic. In addition, he wrote a Gnostic Mass for the order, much to the chagrin of masonic Templars and others who saw this published in *Oriflamme* and interpreted it as a sign that Crowley was taking over their organisation. They were right. He had seen the OTO as the perfect vehicle for promoting his ideals as they had, up until now, been contained by the A∴A∴. The OTO permitted Crowley to find a wider audience, to which he could propound his theories as they existed in *The Book of the Law*, allowing him to attain his life's full potential, converting

people to a means of discovering their destinies and getting in touch with their own will.

Busy with magical matters, Crowley still had time to be a controversial public figure, exercising his belligerence and skill of self-promotion. Although he was scathing of virtually every major poet, Crowley evinced a faint praise for Oscar Wilde whose 'only perversity', he declared, 'was that he was not true to himself.' He identified with Wilde, partly because of his bisexuality and partly because he, too, had kicked against society's traces.

In the late autumn of 1912, Jacob Epstein, the famous sculptor, was at the centre of a scandal concerning his statue on Wilde's grave in the Parisian cemetery of Père Lachaise. The authorities deemed it indecent, for it carried a full set of male genitalia, and hid it beneath a cover. Many artists supported Epstein, but to little effect. A righteously angry Crowley joined in the fray. While in Paris in November, he distributed a pamphlet calling upon the masses to march on the cemetery and remove the offending cover in the cause of art. Warned that the authorities would put armed civil guards in the way of any demonstration, Crowley changed tack. He and a helper hid in the cemetery until after the gates were closed at night, severed the ropes holding the cover down and ran a steel wire to a hiding place in some nearby trees. The idea was to unveil the statue suddenly the next day. The plan misfired. A crowd gathered but the authorities decided against confrontation. Crowley, his grand gesture foiled, unveiled the statue himself by merely removing its cover. He did gain some press coverage, however, so not all was lost. Yet this was not the end of the matter. Robert Ross, Wilde's literary executor who had commissioned the statue, decided to mollify the French authorities and had a butterfly designed to be affixed over the statue's offending member. Crowley and some others later removed this and he smuggled it from the cemetery subsequently to wear it in front of his fly buttons at the Café Royal in London. Epstein, who was present and had originally not liked Crowley joining the controversy, took this in good humour.

The Café Royal was a favourite haunt of Crowley's, even when his wallet was light. Stories, mostly apocryphal, abound of his presence there. It was said that he even met Wilde there, but this seems highly unlikely, as does a more famous tale in which Crowley arrived wearing his magical cloak of invisibility, covered in magical symbols, to walk through the place from Regent Street to Glasshouse Street. The customers fell silent at the spectacle and no one addressed him. As he had in a Mexico City street years before, Crowley took their silence and non-communication as proof that they had not seen him, validating the cloak's efficiency at rendering him unseen.

Crowley's other concern at this time was the advancement of Leila Waddell's musical career. It had stalled, partly owing to her lassitude and partly to her insecurity. Knowing that she would never be a serious classical violinist, he hired six other young female violinists, decked them out in colourful rags, collected together some tunes and launched them on the London scene as The Ragged Ragtime Girls. They opened at the Old Tivoli Theatre on 3 March 1913.

Being an impresario had its drawbacks for it was 'a sickening business', bringing him

> *into contact with a class of society to which I had been altogether a stranger, from the coarse Jew agent to the brutal producer and vulgar performer – all alike in their absolute absorption in money-making, all equally ignorant of and contemptuous of art itself, all equally mean, cowardly, callous, and unscrupulous in everything that touched the show. However good-natured, refined or noble by nature the instant that business came in at the door every decent instinct bolted out of the window. I learnt the crudeness, the harshness, the rottenness, and the ugliness of life as I had never imagined it to be.*

Not content with appearing just in London, Crowley took his act to Moscow for a six week summer engagement in an open-air music cum-variety hall at the Aquarium, an enormous entertainment park. The troupe was ragged in more than its stage attire. According to Crowley, Leila was more or less acceptable,

but of the others, he wrote, 'there were dipsomaniacs, four nymphomaniacs, two hysterically prudish, and all ineradicably convinced that outside England everyone was a robber, ravisher and assassin. They all carried revolvers, which they did not know how to use; though prepared to do so on the first person who spoke to them.' They travelled by slow train, third class, from Warsaw to Moscow, their compartment strewn with straw and occupied by bedbugs. Once in Moscow, Crowley left the group to rehearse and went off on his own to embark upon a period of intense spiritual activity: in other words, he met a new woman.

Anny Ringler (possibly not her real name) was a young Hungarian,

> *tall, tense, lean as a starving leopardess, with wild insatiable eyes and a long straight thin mouth, a scarlet scar which seemed to ache with the anguish of hunger for some satisfaction beyond earth's power to supply. We came together with irresistible magnetism. We could not converse in human language I had forgotten nearly all my Russian, and her German was confined to a few broken cries But we had no need of speech. The love between us was ineffably intense It still inflames my inmost spirit She had passed beyond the region where pleasure had meaning for her. She could only feel through pain, and my own means of making her happy was to inflict physical cruelties as she directed This kind of relation was altogether new to me and it was perhaps because of this, intensified as it was by the environment of the self-torturing soul of Russia, that I became inspired to create for the next six weeks.*

In other words, she was custom-made for Crowley. He was cruel to her and she, presumably, shared his sadomasochism.

His muse awakened by her, he wrote poetry, essays and short stories, including the poems 'The Fun of the Fair', which was in part a verse diary of his time with his girl band and based on a visit Crowley made to the famous fair at Niznij Novgorod, 250 miles east of Moscow, 'Morphia' and a mystery play, *The Ship*, filled with freemasonic interpretive imagery, the chorus of which Crowley incorporated into OTO rituals. He also composed one

of his most enduring poems, *Hymn to Pan*, which he was to use frequently in magical rites for the rest of his life. (At the end of the year, he was given a section in *Cambridge Poets 1900–1913*, although the work chosen was not representative.)

When in Moscow, Crowley noted in his autobiography, he frequented the Hermitage, where he wrote much of his work during this period: no doubt his lodgings were pretty basic and not conducive to creativity. Some of his biographers have picked up on this as an instance of Crowley's inaccurate and often 'convenient' memory, citing the Hermitage as being in St Petersburg. Certainly, the Hermitage palace is: yet the Hermitage to which Crowley was referring was a sumptuous garden where young Muscovites met, caroused and lavishly ate in refined, opulent surroundings, to the tune of a well-known Jewish violinist called Krysh.

After the *Looking Glass* court case, membership of the A∴A∴ had dipped but, by late 1913, it was on the rise again. Among those who joined was Nina Hamnett, the socialite Gwendoline Otter and a fortune-teller called Count Louis Hamon, who went under the stage name of Cheiro. Despite these new recruits, Crowley's cash flow was dire, and he fell back upon staging magical ceremonies to paying audiences. In his ghost 'n'-ghoul book *Rooms of Mystery*, Elliott O'Donnell described attending one of these performances at Avenue Studios on the Fulham Road in South Kensington, which Crowley rented. Passing through an antechamber, the audience sat on a semicircle of chairs behind which were a number of statues. In the centre of the room was a wooden altar and three containers which O'Donnell described as looking like old fashioned sentry boxes or Victorian bathing machines without wheels. The show began with Crowley reading extracts from a book followed by the playing of a dirge, after which a lady (often Leila Waddell) materialised from a sentry box dressed in a flimsy green toga and playing a harp. Two others appeared from the other boxes and similarly played their harps. The lights were then dimmed and Crowley went behind a curtain, to reappear to invoke an assortment of gods in a high-pitched voice. This culminated in

his declaring that he was going to cut his chest. The audience murmured apprehensively and something silver gleamed in the gloom. Crowley then declared, 'I will now dip a burning wafer in my blood.' He passed something through a candle flame, pressed it to his chest, and walked around the room addressing the statues and flashing a dagger in the air. The lights went up and the show ended. More rites were promised, but they were of an initiative variety: the show was intended as a come-on, or loss-leader, to entice new members. After it was over, would-be acolytes were interviewed by Crowley in a back room.

Crowley's reputation spread and stories began to circulate. He was said to have a Tibetan temple bell which he periodically rang; a golden snake slid over the altar during the rites; his women assistants were said to have faces as white as candle wax and, after the rites, orgies followed. The American poet and journalist Harry Kemp, who had stowed away on the SS *Oceanic* to reach England, to be fêted by the literary world and patronised by the expatriate American socialist millionaire Gaylord Wilshire, filed copy to the *World Magazine* in New York about attending a meeting. His article read in part:

> *I found myself in a large, high ceilinged studio the atmosphere of which was coloured a deep blue by the reek of a peculiar smelling incense. In the first room stood row on row of books bound in black and marked on their backs with queer, malformed crosses wrought in silver. The second room was fitted up with divans and literally carpeted with multitudes of cushions tossed here and yon. In the third and largest room stood a tall perpendicular canopy under which the high priest sat during the celebration of black mass. Directly in front of it, on a floor tessellated and mosaiced with parti-coloured patterns and marked with cabalistic signs stood the altar, a black pedestal on top of which was affixed a golden circle. Across the latter lay a golden serpent, as if arrested in the act of crawling. I heard someone behind a curtain playing a weird Chinese like air on some sort of stringed instrument.*

As the performers arrived, Kemp went on:

They [the worshippers] *were mostly women of aristocratic type. Their delicate fingers adorned with costly rings, their rustling silks, the indefinable elegance of their carriage attested their station in life. It was whispered to me that not a few people of noble descent belonged to the Satanists Everybody wore a little black domino which concealed the upper part of the face, making identification impossible. Hung with black velvet curtains, the place presented a decidedly sepulchral aspect The complexions of the women seemed as white as wax There was a fitful light furnished by a single candlestick having seven branches Suddenly this went out and the place was filled with subterranean noises like the sound of a violent wind moving among innumerable leaves Then came the slow monotonous chant of the high priest 'There is no good Evil is good Blessed be the Principle of Evil All hail, Prince of the World, to whom even God Himself has given dominion.'*

Of Crowley himself, Kemp wrote:

At times, I have seen him look seventy, and at times barely twenty-five His looks change seemingly at will Now he is a priest-like old man now apparently a somewhat effeminate youth with soft, plump hands and heavy, womanish face The hands alone do not change, but they are very wonderful, and adorned with weird rings On the thumb Crowley wears a heavy gold band with a blood-red cross on a white ground On one of his fingers is a jewelled serpent, and next to it is a symbolic circle with large studded signet containing the mystic metals. Attached to the end of his watch chain and carried in the vest pocket is the white double-headed sword-bearing eagle, the last and highest degree of the Ancient and Accepted Rite of Scottish Masonry But the most striking thing about Crowley's appearance is the horn-like lock of hair that stands erect on his broad, high forehead Sometimes he parts it in two and then it looks for all the world like a symbol of satanism.

Crowley was intensely annoyed by the piece. It made him out to be a sensationalist, a sort of mystical freak, a magician in the fairground mould rather than a religious leader of his own

order. On the other hand, he hardly had grounds for complaint. Here was yet more publicity to further his reputation as a singular figure.

September 1913 saw the tenth and last issue of the first volume of *The Equinox*. With it came a sea change in Crowley's life. He decided that he was destined to pay more attention to his own personal magical development and that of sexual magical practice. He travelled, as on so many occasions, to Paris, from where he called Neuburg to join him. The plan was to embark upon a series of sexual magical operations which were to become known as the Paris Working.

They commenced on 1 January 1914 and continued without interruption for six weeks. 'We invoked the gods Mercury and Jupiter; and obtained many astonishing results of many kinds, ranging from spiritual illumination to physical phenomena,' Crowley recorded in his autobiography. They were, of course, homosexual operations which Crowley designated to be 11th grade OTO rituals: he wrote of this as being an XI° operation, the number being the inversion of the heterosexual IX° grade.

Both Crowley and Neuburg considered the Paris Working the high point of their magical activities. It was a series of twenty-four invocations to Mercury and Jupiter by which Crowley sought to gain the powers of a high priest and, he also hoped, a boost to his income. The sexual act was called the sacrifice and the sacrament was semen. The penis was referred to as the wand, and Crowley fashioned a statue of Hermes out of wax, in a phallic shape. As in the theatrical performances, Neuburg's breast was symbolically cut. While both men may have enjoyed sodomising each other, the Paris Working was not intended primarily to provide sexual gratification: what Crowley and Neuburg really wanted was communion with the gods, using sex to reach a higher astral and conscious plane. Crowley may have been oversexed, but he was first and foremost a religious, not a debauched, character.

During the operations, ritual poems (or hymns) were recited, often not of Crowley's composition but written by an English journalist called Walter Duranty. A foreign correspondent for

the *New York Times* and, in 1932, a Pulitzer Prize winner, Duranty was a bisexual and both Crowley's friend and lover. He was engaged by Crowley to write incantations in Latin because he was the more proficient in the language. He was also ritually buggered by Crowley in front of a number of acquaintances much to Neuburg's annoyance. This operation took place in an apartment owned by a Frenchwoman, Jane Chéron, another of Crowley's mistresses, thin as a stick, with the hollow cheeks and sunken eyes of a Modigliani model. Duranty later married her. As well as Neuburg and Duranty, it has been speculated that Crowley may well have had a third male companion to assist with the Working: among the A∴A∴ members at the time was the Honourable Everard Fielding, the younger brother of the Earl of Denbigh, a barrister and honorary secretary of the Society for Psychical Research. The proof of him taking part in the Paris Working is, however, tenuous.

The rites, inevitably, involved drug taking as well as sex. Crowley records a number of the visions he experienced during the magical operations. He saw Mercury shimmering gold against a backdrop of brilliant colour and lightning flashes; astral bells rang; the god French kissed him on the mouth, his tongue like a snake's, running 'all over my brain, making the skull luminous, transparent, phosphorescent'; a sword of light appeared against fantastic skyscapes; colours mingled into extraordinary sunsets. It was the imagery of anhalonium. He also experienced fragments of his past lives, in one of which he had been a temple prostitute called Astarte in the Greek city of Agrigentum in Sicily, during classical times.

At some time during the Paris Working, Neuburg and Crowley discussed what they were achieving. Neuburg believed they were unleashing a magical force that it might be beyond them to control. He suggested that Crowley remain the passive partner in their homosexual rites, only becoming the priest, the sexually dominant partner, when women were involved to invoke female deities. Crowley concurred, adding that the true culmination of a rite should be the death of the passive partner. This was an important and, for both of them, terrifying

realisation. If this was where their work was heading, it meant they were moving towards the realm of grey, if not black, magic, which horrified them.

Early in 1914, Crowley suffered a bout of influenza which led to bronchitis, for the relief of which it was suggested he smoke a few pipes of opium: the drug had long been regarded as an everyday treatment for coughs and fevers. Who suggested he try this cure is not known for certain, but it was probably Jane Chéron, who was, as her gaunt appearance betrayed, an opium addict. Opium was, Crowley declared, sacred to Jupiter, and he invoked the god with it in the company of Neuburg, whom the drug made very sick, as is common with first time users.

While under the influence of the drug, Crowley experienced a dream which he subsequently wrote down as a story entitled 'The Stratagem'. It was accepted by the *English Review* and, according to Crowley, Joseph Conrad said it was the best short story he had read in a decade. It was, despite this supposed accolade, a weak piece, predictable and poorly written.

The results of the Paris Working had a practical as well as a magical outcome. Jupiter was a deity linked to the acquisition of wealth and seemed to have commenced acting on both Crowley and Neuburg's behalf. Crowley's social life began to look up and he started to receive some small donations for his coffers, although it was Neuburg, who came into money in the form of a stipend from his relatives, whom the god most benefited, much to Crowley's annoyance, for it seemed that Neuburg was spending his new-found money quite freely, but not on his magical superior.

Crowley's annoyance, however, was assuaged by his belief that what he had done proved that sexual magic worked, and worked faster and more effectively than ritual or ceremonial magic. He considered himself the expert on the subject, setting his thoughts down in five documents restricted in readership to the more senior members of the OTO, in which he dismissed all organised religions and stated the sun to be the supreme deity represented on earth by the sole giver of life, the penis.

The most important of the documents, a definitive thesis

on sexual magic, was one called the *Liber Agapé*. Written in high-flown diction, it concerned mostly heterosexual magic with carefully disguised references to the homosexual. Rich in symbolism, it referred to sexual union as the 'Sacrifice of the Mass' while the 'Elixir', 'the most powerful, the most radiant thing that existeth in the whole universe', was the mingled secretions of the male and female genitalia. Its preparation – that is, sexual intercourse – had to be accompanied by chanting. Ideally, the potent Elixir was achieved by orgasm at the point of death, which Crowley called 'Mors Justi'. The treatise also dealt with the role of cunnilingual and other oral–genital contact, which Crowley dubbed 'vampirism'. Believing, as many did at the time, that semen contained some kind of life force, Crowley went on to consider the creation of an homunculus, one of the most basic and oldest ambitions of the occult sciences.

To Crowley's critics, this was little more than pornographic mumbo jumbo, a hotchpotch of fake philosophies and half-baked theses giving excuse for unrestrained libidinous behaviour. 'Do what thou wilt' was its summation. Yet this is unjust to Crowley: he truly and deeply believed in the potency of sexual magic. Sex, he was convinced, required discipline in order that the sexual current be utilised to raise the consciousness. While, to the non-believer, this may seem far-fetched, it is not so outlandish as it might seem when one considers what is now understood of the chemistry of the brain and how it alters during certain physical and mental processes. What, for the modern scientist, is a knowledge of the action of endorphins was, for Crowley and his fellow occultists, the religious or spiritual experience of ecstasy created from sexual actions, be they hetero-, homo- or auto-erotic. Sex, for Crowley, was neither pornographic nor erotic. He may well have enjoyed it - he most certainly did! – but it was more a means to a magical end than anything else. He summed up his attitude to it quite succinctly: 'When you have proved that God is merely a name for the sex instinct, it appears to me not far to the perception that the sex instinct is God.'

The Paris Working may well have underpinned a major

part of the basis for the rest of Crowley's life, but it also ended his close relationship with Victor Neuburg. When the magical operations were concluded, Neuburg distanced himself from Crowley. He returned to London and, although they stayed in contact for some time, they were never again to be as close as they had been. The cause of the parting of their ways is unclear. Possibly, they fell out over money: Neuburg had it but wasn't, to Crowley's mind, sufficiently generous with it. Certainly, they did not fall out over magic: Neuburg was still fascinated by it. What is most likely is that Neuburg was in love with Crowley and felt that his love was not being returned. Crowley's promiscuousness, in the name of magic, riled Neuburg, who realised that he was, in the long run, little more than a magical, rather than a romantic, companion. Their relationship was, therefore, ended by nothing more than a lover's tiff.

Predictably, Neuburg's family welcomed this split. They had been subsidising his way of life for years, despite their dismay at his giving large tranches of their money to Crowley, whom they considered a parasite. Crowley's name was anathema in the Neuburg camp: Victor's Uncle Edward would become apoplectic with rage at the mere mention of Crowley's name, while his mother just burst into tears.

After a brief and stormy meeting with Crowley in London in May, Neuburg retreated for the summer to Branscombe in Devon, where he lodged with a woman called Olivia Haddon, the owner of a number of cottages in the village. She had been a member of Crowley's circle but, like so many others, had fallen out with him. Staying in one of her other properties was Vittoria Cremers. The illegitimate daughter of a Frenchwoman and a wealthy Jewish banker, she had been married to a Russian nobleman and had met Crowley in New York in 1900. Reduced to near-poverty, Crowley had paid her passage to Britain and employed her as his personal assistant and the first general secretary of the Mysteria Mystica Maxima, yet the relationship was short lived. Crowley accused her of embezzlement and later exacted his revenge by referring to her by her own name in his novel *Moonchild*, describing her as 'a genuine artist

in malice.' Now detached from Crowley, she and Neuburg became friends, bound by their mutual and abiding interest in magic and her abiding dislike of Crowley, whom she considered to be nothing but a charlatan.

Regardless of his family's opinion and Cremers' warnings that Crowley was no good, Neuburg did not cut himself off completely from his former master. In the autumn of 1914, he met Crowley and informed him that he could no longer be a part of his magical life. He disavowed the oaths he had taken in the A∴A∴ and Crowley, consequently, invoked curses for him to die of the worst diseases imaginable. Neuburg was greatly upset at this: after all they had been through, he thought Crowley was being unnecessarily cruel and churlish, and naively believed he would never have been so vindictive. Crowley recorded simply in his diary, 'He left me . . .'

The whole process of the Paris Working and his breaking with Crowley exhausted Neuburg both mentally and physically. He suffered a nervous breakdown for which he was treated by Dr E.T. Jensen, a Freudian psychiatrist and also a former follower of Crowley, who had similarly parted company with him. The following year, the Great War by now in full swing, Neuburg was conscripted into the army, but soon invalided out. He moved into Vine Cottage, in the village of Steyning, in Sussex, where he established the Vine Press, an important small poetry publishing concern. He gave up magic but was a spent force. In 1921 he married, and had a son three years later. Yet the great relationship of his life was the one he had had with Crowley, and he never discounted it. Crowley remained in his thoughts although, as time passed, he grew to be afraid of him. He was always anxious that Crowley might suddenly turn up at Vine Cottage. It is rumoured that Crowley's Scarlet Woman of the time appeared on several occasions, scaring the maid by displaying the Mark of the Beast between her breasts, so there was nothing to say that Crowley would not show up. In fact, in the late 1920s, he did just that. Neuburg's wife, Kathleen, met him. Crowley thumped his stick on the doorstep and demanded to see Victor. Luckily, Neuburg was out, walking

his dog, and word was got to him: he stayed away until Crowley had gone. Several years after this, Neuburg came across Crowley in the occult Atlantis Bookshop, in Museum Street opposite the British Museum in London. They almost stood next to each other, but Crowley did not see Neuburg, who, according to Runia Tharp, who was with him, turned a deathly pale.

Neuburg died of tubercular pneumonia and chronic phthisis on 31 May 1940 at 84 Boundary Road, London. He was fifty-seven. There were those who blamed his illness upon Crowley. Some said his constitution had been weakened by his physical maltreatment by Crowley, the cold nights cutting and sleeping on gorse in Boleskine, the freezing nights in the desert. Others claimed it was Crowley's curse coming to fruition.

14

The Spying Game

In 1914, Crowley was thirty-nine and on the verge of middle age. His future did not look bright. His fortune frittered away and his assets consisting mostly of unsold (and unsaleable) piles of self-published books, he was living not much better than from hand to mouth. The firm muscles he had possessed in his mountaineering years were turned slack, and even his literary powers were starting to slow. In simple words he had peaked, and the remainder of his life was to be a precarious existence centred upon chasing the next pound (or dollar) note.

Having never had gainful employment, Crowley was reduced to living off his wits, unable to seek work even had he wanted it, which he did not: his pride prevented him from looking for work, if indeed the idea of obtaining a job ever occurred to him. Great religious leaders like him did not retrain as bank clerks, schoolmasters or shop managers. They preached to the masses and received alms. Certainly, gifts, donations and membership fees to the A∴A∴ and, later, the OTO were henceforth to be his main source of income.

Crowley realised he was nearing penury and grew increasingly anxious: financial anxiety was to dog the rest of his life, although he rarely admitted to it. He had to keep up appearances as a mage. Just as religious leaders never worked, neither did they go bust.

One of the means by which Crowley shed some of his financial burdens was painful to him. On 5 May 1914, he legally conveyed the ownership of Boleskine to the Mysteria Mystica Maxima, so the property might allow the 'National

Grand Master to possess a seat in the Highlands of Scotland, as a summer residence.' That Crowley was the Grand Master was convenient, but it still meant he no longer owned the house, which, he said, had occupied a special corner in his heart. He was also released from a £900 bond he now had on the estate.

Crowley spent July climbing alone in the Alps. He was trying to rid himself of his flab and get physically and mentally fit enough to have another go at the Himalayas in the 1915 climbing season. Who was to pay for the expedition also played upon his mind. Yet these plans were made redundant on 4 August, when Britain and Germany declared war.

Immediately, Crowley returned to Britain via Paris with the thought and hope in his mind that Britain might need him in her hour of need. He knew he was too old and infirm, from an attack of phlebitis which had weakened his left leg, for active service, but he believed his country could use his intelligence. While this may seem arrogant, it was not. Crowley had a fine mind and was, after all, Cambridge University-educated. He also spoke French fluently, had a good knowledge of German, was widely travelled in Europe and, through his magical studies, was competent with codes and ciphers. On the other hand, he was a noted eccentric and might well have been considered somewhat unstable and therefore unreliable in 'sensitive areas' of the war effort.

For several months, he tried to offer his services. No government documents exist — or they are still restricted under Britain's stringent secrecy legislation — to support his claim of seeking government employment, but it is not unreasonable to believe that this was the truth. He had the right connections. When in Moscow with his all-girl musical troupe, Crowley had met and befriended Michael Lykiardopoulos, generally known as Lyki, who was the Greek secretary of the Moscow Art Theatre, and, through him, had been introduced to R.H. Bruce Lockhart, a senior British secret agent who later 'ran' Lyki as head of the British propaganda department in the city during the First World War. Indeed, it seems likely that Crowley had taken Bruce Lockhart to one of the Ragged Ragtime Girls' shows: the spy was known to frequent the

Aquarium. It might also be noted that Bruce Lockhart was himself keenly interested in the occult. In addition, Everard Fielding, who worked in the Censor's Office, was in a position to further his cause. However, his approaches came to nothing, although probably not, at this stage, because of his dubious reputation but simply because there was a plethora of brilliant minds on offer and Crowley was far down the list.

His rejection irked him. Ever the critic of middle-class, hypocritical, jingoistic, narrow-minded Britain, Crowley found himself repulsed by the country and all for which it stood. He had to get out. It was suffocating him as it always had. On 24 October 1914, he set sail on the SS *Lusitania*, bound for New York. With him, he took fifty pounds in cash, some magical books and masonic charters, a few letters of introduction, clothes and high hopes. He was, he thought, going to stay a fortnight or so and kick start an occult revival in the New World. He stayed five years.

While he might have despised Britain, Crowley was also not enamoured of America. 'I admit frankly [he wrote] that the whole of my intellectual opinion and practically all my personal prejudice combine to condemn the United States wholesale with absolute contempt and loathing ... It is necessary to live in the United States and know the people well to get a really clear view of hell with the lid off.' For all that, he thought that Europe was collapsing under the weight of centuries of Christianity and that the future lay in America. As a parting shot, he published a revision of his 1898 poem, 'An Appeal to the American Republic', in the *English Review*, suggesting an Anglo-US alliance be formed and changing the words to read 'the traitor Prussian' in lieu of 'the traitor Russian'.

Crowley took a room in a hotel at 40 West 36th Street in New York. It was not the most salubrious area, by far. Then, setting up a 'temple', he started to promote himself as a writer and sage, but found no takers for either calling. His reputation, thanks to Harry Kemp, had preceded him. On 13 December, the *World Magazine* published an interview with Crowley, who set the record straight about himself, denying that he was a black magician. Yet even this publicity did nothing to

raise Crowley's profile. People were just not interested in him as a person, or his ideas and philosophy. He was regarded as a freak, a peculiar eccentric of little import and, at best, avoided or, at least, ignored. Crowley might have hated British bigotry but he underestimated by far American conservatism. Furthermore, his letters of introduction seemed worthless. Not only was he without friends, he was even without women.

There was one minor stroke of good fortune that came his way, however. Through a letter of introduction, he met John Quinn, an American lawyer and noted bibliophile who collected modern literary documents and books: he already possessed the manuscript of James Joyce's *Ulysses*. On 12 November, Crowley sold him a number of his poetry books and manuscripts, a total of sixty-seven items, but they realised nothing like as much as he had hoped. The wolf of poverty still bayed at his door and, when he was invited by Quinn to dine with him at Christmas, Crowley was pleased to accept. At the dinner, Crowley met Frederic James Gregg, a well-known New York journalist, and John Butler Yeats, the father of his old protagonist, William Butler Yeats. When word of Crowley's plight reached the Irish poet it did not elicit his sympathy. Quinn's invitation, however, was but a momentary respite from the grind of keeping going.

Then, on the brink of absolute poverty, luck struck again in the form of Frank Crowninshield, the editor of *Vanity Fair*, who asked him to contribute to the magazine. Crowley's first article was a description of a baseball game as seen through the eyes of Kwaw Li Ya, a famous Chinese poet and professor at the University of Peking: the Chinese name was, of course, Crowley's own name in pidgin English. Thereafter, Crowley continued to write for Crowninshield, who not only accepted his work but constructively criticised it, helping Crowley to shape substandard submissions into publishable ones. For the first time, Crowley was being efficiently edited. In addition, he did some freelance work for Evangeline Adams, a well-known New York astrologer, although they later (inevitably) fell out. Between these two sources, Crowley was just about able to keep his head above water.

In February 1915, Leila Waddell joined him from Britain. Although they had been growing apart, she still offered herself magically to Crowley, and they were to stay more or less in regular contact for several more years. Crowley's diary entry for 6 August 1916 touchingly reads, 'M.O.H. [Mother of Heaven, or Leila] is the only thing I have of value; I am not happy. She hasn't written all the week; and I know she hasn't been well.' Four years on, he wrote in his magical diary, '... Rose, whom I idealized and loved for herself, the only one besides Leila Waddell of whom I can say this ... in both cases, the soul was capable of inspiring me with romantic love which is what makes me sing.' It is not certain when Leila finally left Crowley, but she remained in New York until the early 1920s, then returned to her native Australia. Ironically, she became a music teacher in a convent school in Sydney, dying in 1932 of uterine cancer. She was fifty-one.

Crowley did not ignore his magical life, despite his dire straits, and he continued experimenting with sexual magic, recording his efforts in a special diary Each magical sex act had a precise purpose, an aim to cause something specific to happen, often to produce money or raise Crowley's literary muse. He not infrequently took cocaine, opium and morphine to aid the process, recording the details exactly, including the fluidity and taste of the Elixir and the result of the ritual, if any. Crowley considered himself a connoisseur of sexual fluids, which he graded by a scale of flavour acrid, aromatic), strength and viscosity much as one might wines. Indeed, he referred to his own sperm on one occasion as being 'of excellent vintage.'

While Leila was his occasional partner, Crowley more usually resorted to prostitutes, who were totally ignorant of their magical responsibilities. Nevertheless, he recorded his dalliances with them in detail: 'Elsie Edwards. Obese Irish prostitute of maternal Taurus type. 3 dollars ... The unattractiveness of the assistant made the operation difficult. But it was necessary to begin somehow and so far New York has shown me none of its sex side.' Others included 'Helen Marshall, Irish-American prostitute. Taurus rising. Beautiful lazy type.

Not actually passionate or perverse. A cheerful comfortable girl . . . Viola. Hideous taurine doped prostitute.' Anna Grey, whom Crowley visited on a number of occasions, was a 'big fat negress, very passionate.' These women's ignorance helped Crowley and his magic, as he believed that the less intellectual and more primitive a partner was the better they could assist with his magical ambition, of sex untempered by emotion.

For his homosexual magic, Crowley was even more casual in finding partners. His diary entry for 22 May 1915 is indicative. He noted that, at 2.14 a.m., 3.34 a.m. and 3.54 a.m., he had relations with three different men in a Turkish bath house, a common rendezvous for homosexuals. Two of these sodomised Crowley: he gave the third a blowjob. How magically inspired these events were is debatable. Crowley admitted in his diary that they were 'undertaken suddenly and by surprise', and they certainly did not take place in his temple or seem to have involved any magical preparation. In short, Crowley hadn't planned them and was enjoying them in a non-magical fashion.

A month or two before, riding the bus up Fifth Avenue, Crowley had fallen into conversation with a passenger. He let slip the fact that he was not entirely pro-British in the matter of the war and the man gave him his business card bearing the address of the offices of a magazine called *The Fatherland*. This, Crowley later claimed, he recognised as the centre for German propaganda in America, run by Hugo Munsterberg, an instructor in physics at Harvard University, with whom Crowley had once crossed philosophical swords.

Going to the office, Crowley was met by George Sylvester Viereck, a German American writer with 'bulging eyes and the kind of mouth which seems to have been an unfortunate afterthought', whom he had already met in London in 1911 through the auspices of Austin Harrison, editor of the *English Review*. As Crowley has it, he espoused German sympathies and was employed by *The Fatherland*, which Viereck edited, to write pro-German material.

Why Crowley chose to write for the enemy has long puzzled observers. His detractors claim he was a traitor, exercising his anti British bile. His supporters would prefer to

say he was using his position to undermine German propaganda by writing in such a way as to belittle the enemy's propaganda effort. Crowley himself later said he was working as a subversive agent for British intelligence. This is not beyond possibility: as Richard Deacon has pointed out in his exhaustive history of the British secret service, many writers have been employed as intelligence operatives. Even some of Crowley's acquaintances, like Somerset Maugham, Arnold Bennett and Gerald Kelly, had been called upon to serve. However, no evidence has yet come to light to suggest that Crowley was so used: in fact, what little there is points to his having been at best a freelancer. The truth is probably quite simple: Viereck offered to pay Crowley, who was on his uppers at the time and needed the income.

Crowley defended his actions by saying he believed *The Fatherland* was damaging to British interests in America and decided to fight against it from within. He knew this would not look good, and would lose him friends, but he felt he had no other choice: British propaganda was weak while the German effort was clever, articulate and therefore dangerous. That his patriotism was doubted was to shock him: he agreed he was often critical of Britain but this did not imply disloyalty. He argued that the 'traditions of England are intertwined inextricably with a million abuses and deformities which I am only too eager to destroy', yet he allowed that 'Shakespeare's patriotism in John of Gaunt's dying speech in *Henry V* appeals directly to my poetic sense. I am quite prepared to die for England in that brutal, unthinking way. "Rule, Britannia" gets me going as if I were the most ordinary music-hall audience. This sentiment is not interfered with by my detestation of the moral and religious humbug which one is expected to produce at moments of national crisis. My patriotism is of the blatant unintelligent variety, popularized by Kipling.'

There is much to be said about this episode in Crowley's life in his favour. His propagandist writings were often well over the top and he must, with his wicked sense of humour, have enjoyed penning the material. His arrogance would have been fed by his erudition. The sense of the dramatic must

have appealed to him, too. And he got paid. He may even have thought that his actions might eventually be seen as somehow heroic and would eradicate some of his notoriety. He could not have been more wrong.

Claiming to Viereck to be not only anti-British but also pro Fenian, Crowley wrote a pastiche of the American Declaration of Independence, adjusting it to the Irish nationalist cause. With nine others (including Leila Waddell), he took a boat out to Bedloe's (now Liberty) Island, upon which stands the Statue of Liberty, landing there at exactly 4.32 a.m. on 3 July 1915: the timing was propitious to the Irish Once there, they raised the Irish flag as Leila played 'The Wearing of the Green' upon her violin. Crowley tore up an envelope, purporting to be his British passport, and threw it in the sea. The demonstration over, they returned to the city and had a celebration breakfast. The *New York Times* reported the incident.

The story soon faded in the press but lingered in the consciousness of British diplomatic and political circles. The British ambassador in Washington, Sir Cecil Arthur Spring-Rice, reported the episode to the Foreign Secretary, Sir Edward Grey, back in London, adding that Crowley was writing for an enemy publication. It was also noted that Frank Harris was in New York and similarly voicing pro German sentiments. At about this time, Crowley claims he tried to contact the British Military Mission in Washington, to offer his services as a spy in the German community in New York but – again – he was rebuffed.

Undeterred, Crowley went on writing pro-German articles. In late 1916, he justified the execution for alleged spying of the nurse Edith Cavell, while in 1917 he mooted the case for Britain to become a German colony, advocated the use of submarines (at the time considered contrary to the rules of warfare) and argued that the *Lusitania* should be regarded as a warship. This could not have endeared him to the American authorities: in passage to Britain, the ship was torpedoed by a German submarine off Ireland in May, 1915, with the loss of 1198 lives, 128 of them American. On the other hand, Crowley's justification that the ship be regarded as a military target was fair, even if he did

not know it. She was, in contravention of the articles of war, carrying allied munitions in her cargo.

His journalism went from outlandish strength to strength, his tongue lodged more and more firmly in his cheek as the months passed. Hyperbole was the name of his game. In August 1915, he had published a particularly virulent but eccentric piece for a magazine called *The Open Court* in Chicago. It referred to 'obscene dwarfs like George V' and 'pot-bellied bourgeois like Poincaré' (the French president), to Wilhelm II 'the genius of his people' and 'incarnation of Lohengrin, Siegfried and Parsifal', the Kaiser having 'the quality that Castor and Pollux had for Rome', being 'omniscient, omnipotent, omnipresent and beautiful, sent to save the Fatherland from savage foes.' It ended 'Ave, Guglielme, rex, imperator!' He even went so far as to complain about the ineffectuality of German bombing missions over Britain. He wrote, 'A great deal of damage was done at Croydon, especially at its suburb Addiscombe, where my aunt lives. Unfortunately her house was not hit. Count Zeppelin is respectfully requested to try again. The exact address is Eton Lodge, Outram Road.'

Later, Crowley protessed to having had another undeclared aim in writing pro-German articles, apart from defusing German propaganda. He wanted to bring America into the war on the side of the Allied forces. Yet the British did not appreciate his motives and he attracted more attention, this time in Europe. The *Daily Mail* correspondent in the Netherlands, Charles Tower, contacted the British consul-general in Rotterdam on 30 June 1916, commenting upon German propaganda in neutral Holland. Crowley's name came up. The Foreign and Home Offices were involved and Crowley was put under investigation. It was suggested that information about him might be passed to Captain Guy Gaunt, the British naval attaché in Washington, with a view to discrediting Crowley in the USA. At the same time, the Home Secretary instructed the police to investigate him and seek out the truth of a rumour contained in German propaganda that Crowley had visited Britain in 1916 to assess the morale of the country. At the end of August, Detective

Inspector Herbert Finch reported that there was no evidence to suggest that Crowley had visited Britain. A full report on his life to 1916 was then compiled by a Superintendent Quinn. It contained little of any intelligence value but cast a number of admittedly justified aspersions upon his character.

These findings were passed to the Foreign Office, which forwarded them to Gaunt and the passport authorities: destroying one's passport was a criminal offence. That Crowley had seemingly destroyed his was not considered the action of a patriot.

Of course, Crowley was ignorant of this interest in him until, that is, the spring of 1917, when the police raided the London offices of the OTO at 93 Regent Street. Other raids were carried out upon some of his acquaintances and a bookseller, found in possession of a copy of *The Open Court*, was jailed for three months. Crowley was livid. 'The Stupids [he wrote in his diary] have misunderstood my whole attitude and raised trouble. Now I go direct to Washington to straighten this out; if I fail this time to get them to listen to sense, at least I can go to Canada, and force them to arrest me.' Yet he did not: he knew it was futile. Then, on 6 April, Crowley's secret ambition came to fruition: America entered the war.

Crowley's luck began, from the spring of 1915, to change in other ways than by his employment as a salaried, quasi pro-German propagandist. He seems to have once more found his touch with women - other than whores, that is. Ever watchful for a Scarlet Woman to help him with his magic, Crowley met two likely candidates at a dinner party thrown by a journalist acquaintance. They were Jeanne Foster and Helen Hollis, whom he respectively named the Cat and the Snake. Helen Hollis 'glittered with the loveliness of lust; but she was worn and weary with the disappointment of insatiable desire', whereas Jeanne Foster was his 'ideal incarnate.' Of the two, Helen Hollis was to fall by the wayside, but not before Crowley had given her his 'serpent's kiss', as he called it. This consisted of taking her hand and pinching the skin of her wrist between his canine teeth, which were quite pointed. Beating time with one hand, he would suddenly snap his jaw shut and open,

leaving two dents in the skin, like the bites of a snake's fangs but, of course, much farther apart. (Crowley was rumoured to have had his teeth sharpened, but this is incorrect, just a part of the myth wound around him in later years; so, too, was the story that he was prone to defecating on the carpet in homes where he was a house guest, claiming his shit was sacred, like that of the Dalai Lama or the emperors of China.)

It was not long before Jeanne Foster became Crowley's third Scarlet Woman, taking the name of Sister Hilarion. They performed sexual magic together, she priming his muse, for he wrote a lot of verse while with her. Magic aside, Crowley professed his love for her and said he wanted her to carry his child: indeed, he came close at one point to marrying her. What she did produce, however, was a 'magical' son.

Charles Stansfeld Jones was an accountant from London who lived near Vancouver, having emigrated there in 1913. In his late twenties, he had been an A∴A∴ member for several years and had frequently corresponded with Crowley, setting up an OTO lodge in British Columbia. Known as Frater Omnibus in Vnus (OIV) and Frater Achad or Arctaeon, Jones had also been sending Crowley occasional sums of money, either as donations or his share of initiation fees.

In *The Book of the Law*, it was written that 'one [would] cometh after him, whence I say not, who shall discover the key of it All.' Crowley considered himself to be the prophet after whom another would come to explain the book's mysteries. He believed this person would be his son, if not physically then metaphysically. On the autumnal equinox in 1915, Crowley and Jeanne Foster carried out a number of magic sex rites which, on the following summer solstice in 1916, produced the magical son. This was Jones, who had, in Vancouver, received notice from the Secret Chiefs that he was now a Master. When he cabled this news to New York, Crowley was thrilled and was convinced that Jones was his metaphysical son. Sadly for Crowley, Jones was not all he might have hoped for. Although he did do some work upon *The Book of the Law*, it was slight. According to Crowley, who expelled him from the OTO in the mid-1920s, he eventually

converted to Catholicism in order to infiltrate it and subvert it to Crowleyanity, to have then lost his mind and to have taken to exposing himself in public on the streets of Vancouver. This was an example of Crowley's vituperation: Jones died in February, 1950, an eccentric but quite sane, who embraced Catholicism in part to exorcise the occult. It was he who, during the Second World War, introduced Crowley's work to the novelist Malcolm Lowry who, in turn, was fascinated by the occult and received inspiration for his famous novel, *Under the Volcano*, from reading about Abramelin.

As restless as ever, Crowley decided to go on a tour of the USA and, on 6 October 1915, set off with Jeanne Foster and her elderly husband. Where Crowley got the money for this trip is unknown: most probably the Fosters provided it. In Detroit, Crowley was given some particularly pure samples of anhalonium by Parke Davis, the pharmaceuticals giant. In Chicago – which Crowley remarked was 'the forlorn outpost of civilised man. Every mile beyond marks a lower rung on the ladder of evolution . . . Not until one crosses the Rockies is there any semblance of resurrection' – he met Paul Carus, the noted philosopher and Buddhist scholar. In Vancouver, he touched base with Jones. Moving on, the trio went to Seattle and San Francisco, much rebuilt since Crowley's last visit, as a result of the 1906 earthquake.

While in San Francisco, Crowley was asked to give a public lecture, which he opened with the phrase 'Do what thou wilt shall be the whole of the Law', upon which he then expanded. It was the first time he had publicly proclaimed the doctrine outside his own circle of disciples and like minds, and he realised that he was now a magus whose responsibility it was to preach this gospel. Be that as it may, he was not to find many takers for it in America, where Christianity was too firmly rooted.

Leaving San Francisco, Crowley and the Fosters travelled to Santa Cruz then on to Los Angeles where he was cautious of the 'cinema crowd of cocaine-crazed, sexual lunatics, and the swarming maggots of near occultists' who might have welcomed him with open arms, thighs and wallets but Crowley had standards to

maintain and little time for dilettantes. The next stop was San Diego where, at her home on Point Loma, Crowley hoped to talk to Katherine Tingley, head of the American branch of the Theosophical Society, but she refused a meeting. Somewhat snubbed, Crowley took a quick trip over the US/Mexican border to Tijuana, filled with 'refugees from righteousness. It is composed exclusively of brothels, drinking saloons and gambling hells. I don't care for this sort of thing, but it was at least much better than anything north of the border.' From here, they visited the Grand Canyon (not as grand as the Himalayas, according to Crowley), staying at the Bright Angel Lodge on the south rim. Crowley descended into the canyon to the Colorado river by way of the Bright Angel Trail.

By the time they reached New York at the end of their perambulations, Jeanne Foster had had enough of Crowley and they parted company. Crowley then took up with Ananda K. and Alice Ethel Coomaraswamy: he was a Eurasian art historian and critic, she a woman from Yorkshire whom Crowley found not only very sexually attractive but possessed of a fine singing voice. Nicknaming her Monkey (or Monkey Officer), he offered to make her the talk of the town and promptly fell in love with her. On the night of 15/16 April 1916, he and she had a long bout of sexual magic of which Crowley wrote, 'This Operation is the most magnificent in all ways since I can remember. The Orgasm was such as to have completely drowned the memory of the Object . . .' Coomaraswamy did not complain: indeed, he asked Crowley to fix him up with a mistress. Crowley obliged. He had a number of women on the go simultaneously – including one he called Owl – so procuring an individual or two for his lover's spouse required little effort. After a short while, Alice discovered that she was pregnant with Crowley's child and decided to go to England, where she had other children living, to prepare to bring them to America and settle up her affairs back home. However, crossing the Atlantic, she miscarried the foetus. When she got word of this to Crowley, he accused her of killing the child and their relationship petered out.

Crowley spent the summer of 1916 on a 'magical retirement', living in a cabin on Lake Pasquaney (now called Newfound

Lake) near Bristol in New Hampshire, the property belonging to Evangeline Adams. Here, Crowley enjoyed the outdoor life, the occasional company of several of his current women and one or two male friends. He felled a tree, paddled a canoe out to an island, researched the Elixir of Life (a preparation he had made and of which he had taken seven doses before leaving New York) and, by means of a ritual of his own contrivance involving the capture, worship, execution and consumption of a live frog, finally became a Magus in the Great White Brotherhood of Light (or the A∴A∴), calling himself the Master Therion.

Employing a young woman from a nearby town as a dictation secretary, Crowley embarked upon an essay on the preface of George Bernard Shaw's *Androcles and the Lion*. He intended just a short criticism but got carried away and ended up with a 45,000-word critical treatise entitled *The Gospel According to Bernard Shaw*. This was followed by some short stories based upon J.G. Frazer's *The Golden Bough*, a popular study of religious origins.

When the secretary was absent, Crowley continued with his magic under the influence of an assortment of drugs, receiving one particular vision he referred to in his magical diary as the 'Star-Sponge' vision, in which the cosmos was shown to him filled with stars which metamorphosed into interlinked ideas and souls. From this, Crowley realised the oneness, the interrelationship of everything in creation, which was to underpin much of his future thought.

The drug he used for this vision was ether, which he sniffed, much as adolescent glue sniffers sniff glue. An example of his use of ether is referred to in his diary entry for 23 August:

> *I have been sucking up the vapour of Ether for a few moments, and all common things are touched with beauty So, too with opium and cocaine, calm, peace, happiness, without special object, result from a few minutes of those drugs What clearer proof that all depends on state of mind, that it is foolish to alter externals? A million spent on objets d'arts would not have made this room as beautiful as it is just*

now — and there is not one beautiful thing in it, except myself. Man is only a little lower than the angels, one step, and all glory is ours!

In addition, Crowley was using anhalonium mixed with chocolate and what he called Myriam Deroxe pills, a mixture of morphine, opium and sparteine named after a lady friend. There has been some conjecture about him using heroin at this time. Crowley referred to his drugs in his diaries by their (as he thought) chemical formulæ, but he was not always correct. He gave ether accurately as $(C_2H_5)_2O$, but he also referred to C_2H_6O, which editors of his work have erroneously assumed was ethanol (grain alcohol), which is actually CH_3CH_2OH. In one entry, for 7 September 1916, he writes of using Eth_2o_2, which some have assumed to be heroin. This is not possible: the formula for heroin (or diacetylmorphine) is $C_{12}H_{23}NO(C_2H_3O_2)_2$, and his formula most likely refers either to ether or what Crowley called 'ethyl' (ethyl alcohol), which he also sometimes affectionately called Ethel. He was also taking cocaine at Lake Pasquaney, so that might also feature in his scientific shorthand: but he was most certainly not taking heroin.

His summer magical holiday over, Crowley returned to New York in October and, the next month, published an essay in *Vanity Fair* entitled 'The Attainment of Happiness', which touched upon the recreational or mind expanding use of drugs:

You can woo the butterfly – the poppy bud. You can float, like a butterfly, in the enchanted air. You have only to draw a little of the hydro-chloride of cocaine into your nostrils, and you become full of intense virility and energy, a devourer of obstacles. To smoke a few pipes of opium, and you rise to the cloudless and passionless bliss of the philosopher. To swallow a little hashish and you behold all the fantastic glories of fable, and those a thousandfold, or to woo a flask of ether, breathing it as if it were the very soul of your Beloved — and you will perceive the heart of Beauty in every vulgar and familiar thing.

At about this time, Crowley also advocated the legalisation of drugs. The US government had brought in the Harrison Act in 1914, banning the sale of drugs off prescription, Crowley arguing against this for the reason that illegalisation would drive the drug trade underground and open it up for lucrative criminal enterprise. While acknowledging the spectre of physical and psychological addiction, he supported the moderate use of drugs and, in an essay on cocaine, stressed how it could be life enhancing. He stated that cocaine could extend the consciousness to allow one to achieve one's full potential, and gave examples from the lives of famous artists. Yet he added the proviso that, to truly master himself, a man could use cocaine as he needed it and avoid addiction. After all, he claimed with pride, he did.

Crowley's investigation of various drugs, which was probably more intense than that conducted by anyone else until the Swinging Sixties, was not restricted to self experimentation. He carried out tests on or with others, which place him at least equal to Aldous Huxley as a writer and chronicler of the part drugs play in the visionary experience. Had Crowley not developed such a notorious reputation, he would surely have been as seriously considered in due course as Huxley was after the publication of *The Doors of Perception* and *Heaven and Hell*. Sadly, his American experimental notes are lost, although documents outlining his trawling the tenements of Brooklyn hunting 'for a dozen decks [of cocaine] at $15' are still in existence.

On 9 December, still restive, Crowley arrived in New Orleans with the intention of undergoing another magical retirement. Although he hated most American towns, for their 'standardized hotels and standardized merchandise' which suborned individuality, he loved New Orleans. 'The old French-Spanish quarter of the city is [he wrote] the only decent inhabited district that I discovered in America. From the architecture to the manners of the people, their clothes, their customs and their cookery, all was delightful.' Renting accommodation near the Old Absinthe House, where absinthe was still made, he started to write frantically, undeterred by the fact that he had 'not even proper paper or money to

buy it. Total cash in hand 70 cents.' In less than three weeks, he wrote poetry, essays and short stories, invented a literary detective called Simon Ift and started a novel called *The Butterfly Net* or just *The Net*). It was Crowley's first attempt at a full length novel, a *roman à clef* drawing upon events in his life in which most of the characters were people he knew, and including himself as a minor one of their number. It was to become Crowley's famous novel, *Moonchild*.

The story centres on the creation of an homunculus, the moonchild of the title. A sort of extraterrestrial being, conceived by magical means, it is intended to be a messianic creature. The novel is flawed, at times hard to read, and, like so much of Crowley's writing, suffers from a considerable lack of editorial prudence, yet it was far ahead of its time in its basic literary premise. It was also scientifically prophetic. Crowley foresaw in vitro fertilisation decades ahead of its invention. Indeed, in 1921, he wrote, 'that it should be impossible to create high organic life is scientifically unthinkable and the Master Therion believes it to be a matter of a few years indeed before this is done in the laboratory.'

Another literary work Crowley began in New Orleans, but never finished, was a novella, *Not the Life and Adventures of Sir Roger Bloxham*. Containing autobiographical and sexual material, it was at least partly inspired by Crowley's not infrequent visits to the bordellos of New Orleans. Close by the Spanish quarter was 'a large and picturesque red light section; one of the most interesting places of its kind that I have ever seen. In fact if we except Cairo, it would have been hard to beat.'

From New Orleans, Crowley went in early February 1917 to Titusville, near Cape Canaveral in Florida, where Lawrence Bishop, the son of Crowley's pious Uncle Tom, owned a citrus farm. Crowley intensely disliked his cousin, whose family displayed the 'unspeakable degradation of humanity which is constantly being wrought by Christianity and commerce', complained about the food and described Bishop's wife as a hag with no concept of anything other than a terror of the hereafter. Cast in the mould of his father, Lawrence believed God had sent the iceberg which sank the SS *Titanic* as punishment for man's

belief in the ship's invulnerability. Crowley seems, however, to have done Bishop a favour: he recorded in his diary on 6 March that, by the exercise of his will, he held back a severe frost which would have decimated his cousin's citrus groves.

By the time he reached New York again, Crowley was both physically and spiritually sick. That, as noted in his diary, he had had sex only five times since the new year indicated his condition. For weeks, he was filled with lassitude. The Secret Chiefs appeared to have given up on him, he stopped keeping his magical diary, and his financial situation worsened by the day. He took up with a portrait painter, Leon Engars Kennedy, whom he had known briefly in Europe. Kennedy had an allowance from his family, but he blew it as soon as he received it. Together, he and Crowley just about survived, the latter chivvying the artist into working. They lived in a ramshackle house at the lower end of Fifth Avenue, without utilities – but at least it was a roof over their heads.

On 6 May, Crowley received word of his mother's death. 'Two nights before news [he wrote] had dreamed that she was dead, with a feeling of extreme distress. The same happened two nights before I had news of my father's death. I had often dreamed my mother had died, but never with that helpless, lonely feeling.' It is a telling statement: for all the animosity he had felt towards his mother, her Christian beliefs and her strait-laced, middle-class, boring existence, he still felt deeply for her. Theirs was a love–hate relationship, but there must have been a leaning towards the love in it, although Crowley the rebel did not wish to admit to it. Crowley was rootless, had chosen to live an eccentric, wandering life and had cast himself adrift, and yet, for all his pomposity and arrogance, his anti Christian attitudes and his self-assured status as a magus, he still retained in his mind, if not in actuality, a skein that kept him tethered to the safe past of his early years. He may have seemed self confident in the extreme, yet there was a corner of his soul that wanted peace and stability. Now, with Emily Crowley's passing, he was truly at sea in the ocean of his life.

As the New York weather warmed, Crowley's health

returned. In May, he conducted a number of magical rites with the feeling that his recent setbacks had been a test for his future as the Prophet of the Law of Thelema. He began to see himself as a missionary charged with showing people that they had a right to self-determination in spiritual matters. That this, of course, meant they were theoretically free to chose to be Christians (or Plymouth Brethren, come to that) seems to have been overlooked.

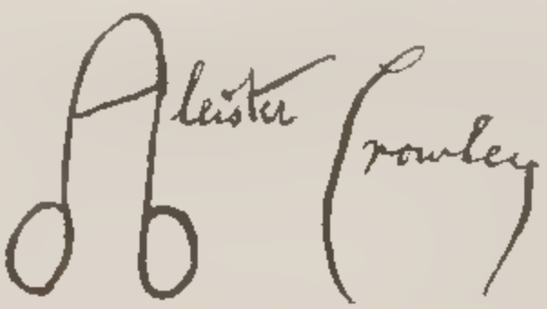
One of his rituals, no doubt intended to raise a bit of money, worked. In the summer of 1917, Crowley was appointed contributing editor of *The International* on a salary of twenty dollars a week. Run by Viereck, it was a literary and political monthly with a very low circulation, in which Crowley had previously published some articles, including an erudite essay entitled, 'The Heart of Holy Russia'. Crowley later declared he took on the job because not only did it pay but he was also able to keep an eye on the journal's German backers, on behalf of the US Department of Justice, America now being in the war. How much truth lies behind this is unknown. It seems hardly likely that Crowley was a US government stool pigeon.

Very quickly, Crowley used the magazine to promote his magic. Along with the occasional anti-British piece, he wrote occult articles under the names of, among others, Aleister Crowley, The Master Therion, Baphomet, Edward Kelly, Lord Boleskine, and Adam d'As: indeed, he seems to have written virtually the entire contents of the issues he edited. He missed not a trick in promoting and explaining the Law of Thelema, spreading his gospel and increasing the magazine's circulation. Even his political polemics contained Thelemic comment.

During his stay on Lake Pasquaney, Crowley had been visited by Lindsay M. Keasbey, a professor in institutional history at the University of Texas in Austin. Erudite and charming, Keasbey was a socialist eccentric – his views had recently cost him his university teaching post – and admirer of Crowley: it had been mooted that Crowley should go to Austin to open an OTO lodge there but this did not materialise. Keasbey, now living in New York, had played a part in Crowley being appointed to his editorial position.

Without Crowley being informed, Viereck, cutting his losses now that America was involved in the war, sold the magazine to Keasbey, who promised to keep Crowley employed but in fact vetoed all his contributions, the enterprise then failing. Crowley was quick to claim that, 'as soon as people found my name absent they would not buy it. Its sudden destruction was the greatest compliment I had ever received.' Compliment it may have been, but it left Crowley unemployed again, and it had drawn new attention to him with the Foreign Office back in London.

His involvement with *The International* was to produce a change of direction in Crowley's creative life. Over the years, especially in Paris, Crowley had mixed with artists such as Gerald Kelly and Auguste Rodin, but he had never attempted to paint himself. He regarded himself as more of an art critic than a practitioner. However, when he took over *The International*, he needed artists to design the covers but could find none, so he started designing them himself. In the end, none of the covers was executed by him but they were based upon his ideas and, in some instances, sketches. Thus, this albeit untrained talent awakened, he embarked upon a career as an artist. At first, he signed his pictures with his highly stylised full signature, the capital *A* drawn as a stylised phallus:



However, he later reverted to just that distinctive phallic letter, which became his hallmark.

Written in full, his signature provided an interesting study for handwriting experts. Patricia Marne, in her seminal work *Crime and Sex in Handwriting*, comments: '[Crowley's] signature with the abnormally strong downstrokes going into the lower zone (note his capital *A*) shows his pre-occupation with the elemental instinctive drives, an inflated sexual imagination, and leaning to perversions. The sabre-like strokes of the capital

C and small y indicate sadistic tendencies, while the heavy pressure is a sign of his energy and sensuality. The whole signature shows exaggerated sexual urges and excesses.' Of course, she was writing with full knowledge of his nefarious reputation.

Painting supplemented more writing. As well as creating additional Simon Iff tales, which Crowley published in serial form under the pseudonym of Edward Kelly after the Elizabethan magician, he also produced the magical works *De Lege Libellum* (or *The Sandal*) and *Liber Aleph* (or *The Book of Wisdom or Folly*), dealing with a wide range of matters from drugs and sex to *The Book of the Law*, addressed as an extended letter to Charles Stansfeld Jones. At the same time, Crowley worked on organising OTO ritual material, which he published in *The International* in the March 1918 issue.

Such creative energy was inevitably linked to sexual activity, a number of women (some Scarlet, some not) passing through his life, magical existence and bed. Some were prostitutes. Many did not stay long, as they were unappreciative of Crowley's sexual proclivities, now based as they were upon what he called intercourse 'per vas nefandum', or 'by the unspeakable vessel' – in other words, buggery. This, he sincerely believed, was magically more potent than vaginal copulation. He also continued to seek out every kind and condition of woman for sex. Crowley claimed to have studied the sexuality of between eighty and ninety different nationalities, and to have come thereby to the conclusion that every moral principle was upheld somewhere by somebody and, therefore, morality was beyond judgmental consideration. He thought 'sexual knowledge should be based broadly on intercourse with, say, 1,000 women chosen from, say, 80 to 100 races and sub-races. Other branches of the study are easily mastered, except Sapphism, which is hard even to witness, as you have to be on very intimate terms with one of the girls, and if both are real exclusive Sapphists you can't be, unless you can work your Point of View as an artist or student of sex.' With his tongue firmly in his cheek, Crowley added, 'I had an awful blow last November when a girl asked me, "Have you ever been pricked with needles in the dark?"

and I had not. The red brand of shame sears my forehead to this hour.'

Among the women with whom he consorted during 1917 and 1918 was Anna Catherine Miller. They met in a restaurant on Eighth Avenue, then rented an apartment together on Central Park West near 110th Street. Crowley nicknamed her the Dog (or, on occasion, Anubis, after the Egyptian jackal headed deity) because he said she was both physically and morally canine. She was sexually compliant, but their relationship did not last more than a few months: she had, Crowley stated, a certain madness in her and took to the bottle, just as Rose had done. It seems fair to assume she could only take so much sex 'per vas nefandum' and the strain told. Crowley's sexual peccadillos and overpowering charisma not infrequently destroyed those around him, although he never saw his part, or admitted his fault, in their downfall. As far as he was concerned, the magical forces had been depleted, and his partner was therefore no longer strong enough to face the ordeals of magic, as he was. As for his views on women, they had changed little over the years. In his diary for September 1916 he noted, 'It is impossible to make a tragedy of a man leaving his wife; because women don't count. They only exist insofar as they seduce or otherwise destroy men. A deserted woman may be comic or pathetic; never tragic.' Several months later, he added, 'Note that we naturally and inevitably divide women into chaste and unchaste; thereby subconsciously affirming that Cunt is the only important thing about them.'

Anna Miller discarded, Crowley moved to a studio apartment on West 9th Street which he shared with one of her friends, Roddie Minor: the three of them had for a while formed a magical *ménage à trois*. Roddie was separated from her husband, and Crowley called her the Camel or Sister Achitha. Sexual magic with her ('per vas nefandum', of course) was aided by an assistant, Walter Grey, whom Crowley described as 'a musical negro', and a pretty Russian woman called Marie Lavroff. Roddie Minor was muscular and well built, 'physically a magnificent animal, with a man's brain well

stocked with general knowledge and a special comprehension of chemistry and pharmacy.' This is hardly surprising as she was a qualified pharmacist and worked in a pathology laboratory. She was therefore of great use to Crowley: she had a regular salary coming in and access to the keys to a comprehensively stocked drugs cupboard. Indeed, he acknowledged her worth in her moniker: she was called the Camel because she had helped him across the desert of his current life. He must have felt a fondness for her for he also referred to her as Eve

Interested in the occult before she met Crowley, Roddie Minor had another factor in her favour. She was not averse to narcotic experimentation. She and Crowley imbibed opium, ether, anhalonium and cocaine together. Their relationship set off upon the usual path of sexual attraction followed by clairvoyant realisation then magical achievement. In January 1918, she had a vision containing an egg under a palm tree. Crowley was thrilled. He and Mary d'Este Sturges had been told to search for just such an item in just such a place. With this apparent continuity of image, he wondered if it was Ab-ul-Diz speaking to her or managing her vision. When he questioned Roddie Minor, she mentioned a person she called The Wizard, who was trying to communicate with Crowley. After testing this person, Crowley was convinced he was genuine and discovered he was an astral being called Amalantrah.

Over the spring and summer of 1918, Crowley and Roddie Minor frequently contacted Amalantrah. Each time, they started with an act of sexual magic then, taking either opium, anhalonium or hashish (or a combination of them), they interviewed him, Crowley gaining a substantial amount of magical wisdom. Not all went smoothly. On one occasion, Crowley overdosed Roddie Minor on anhalonium. She was in agony for hours, Crowley putting this down in his diary to the god Mercury (anhalonium was a mercurial substance) being 'too pure for her corrupt mind and body.'

Roddie Minor was Crowley's next Scarlet Woman but, even with this accolade, it was not long before they separated as magical partners. Crowley claimed she grew indifferent to

the Work: she was probably just getting bored. Additionally, Crowley was particularly intense when engaged in magical matters and she probably wanted a good sex life unencumbered by magical connotations. Certainly, they continued to have non-magical sex for some months. Yet she had served her purpose by introducing him to Amalantrah.

A succession of disappointing women followed the Camel. There was Marie Rohling, who did not come up to expectations, being indecisive, and Bertha Almira Prykryl, who, it appears, had no idea of what she was letting herself in for and fled.

With them gone, Crowley was without board or lodging again, and with no income. To remedy this, he decided to go on another magical retirement, and so, in the summer of 1918, he set off up the Hudson River on the Albany bound steamer with a canoe, a tent and some meagre supplies provided by a friend, William Seabrook, who had conducted a whip-round among Crowley's acquaintances Like Christ, Crowley intended to be gone into the wilderness for forty days.

Seabrook, who had been introduced to Crowley by Frank Harris over lunch one day, described him at this time in his life as

> *a strange disturbing fellow with a heavy pontifical manner mixed with a good deal of sly, monkeylike, and occasionally malicious humor He wore an enormous star sapphire on the forefinger of his right hand, and had his head shaved just then in the manner of Erich von Stroheim He later sprouted an American Indian warlock which curled slightly and made him somewhat resemble (with his round smooth-shaven face and big round eyes) a nursery imp masquerading as Mephistopheles The talk at that luncheon left me gasping Frank Harris was one of the greatest conversationalists of this or any other century, and Crowley talked like Pain's Fireworks.*

Seabrook, who later wrote an important book on witchcraft, did more than provide Crowley with camping equipment. For a while, he also shared his wife, Kate, with him.

Crowley set up camp on Esopus Island in the Hudson

between Esopus and Staatsburg, about ninety miles upriver from Manhattan. About half a mile long and 500 feet wide, it was uninhabited and covered in forest. He liked to give the impression that he was out in the wilds, living like Thoreau, but this was not so: the land on both banks was farmed and, here and there, the wealthy had established country estates: he was only a few miles upriver from the Vanderbilts' mansion. Every now and then, Roddie Minor brought him some provisions and no doubt had sex with him. Much of his time he seems to have spent paddling about in his canoe and meditating cross-legged on the shore of the island, much to the consternation of the locals, who, realising he was hard up, occasionally gave him fresh eggs, vegetables and milk. He also started work on a translation of Lao Tzu's *Tao te Ching* and practising his magic, particularly of the anti-mosquito variety, in which he was uncomfortably out of practice. Unprotected by both magic, insect repellent and a mosquito net, he was badly bitten.

Among his magical achievements on the island was the acquisition of a magical memory. By exercising this to penetrate deep into his unconscious, he managed to go into meditative trances and discover some of his previous incarnations. Among these were Ko Hsuen, a disciple of Lao Tzu, a Knight Templar, Pope Alexander VI, Count Cagliostro (an eighteenth century occult charlatan) and Eliphas Lévi.

Halfway through his retirement, Crowley returned to New York City for a day and, while there, expressed to a friend his regret that the island provided no female companionship. The friend knew just the girl to remedy the situation: her name was Madeleine George. Crowley wrote her a note and she agreed to meet him. In the meantime, on 21 August, he went back to his insular existence armed with some good-quality wine, brandy, absinthe, canned food and a large quantity of red paint, as well as several broad brushes and a rope. With the latter, he suspended himself down several riverside cliffs, which he painted with the slogans 'Every Man and Woman is a Star' and 'Do what thou wilt shall be the whole of the Law', for the benefit of passing river-boat passengers.

Several days later, in response to a telegram which reached his camp, Crowley took his canoe downriver to near the town of Hyde Park, where he met Madeleine at the railroad station. (He was also apparently accosted at the station by a local Dutchess County sheriff's office official, who wanted to know what he was doing on the island.) The girl who stepped off the train was a pretty redhead with curly hair and a huge cabin trunk. With some difficulty, they got the trunk into the canoe and up to the campsite, although it swamped the little vessel and they had to be rescued by two young lads fishing off the bank. When she saw the camp, Madeleine was not amused but, after some fulmination, settled down to several days in Crowley's company, after which she took herself back to the city.

On 9 September, Crowley's forty days in the wilderness were up. He returned to Manhattan physically fit and magically fitter, which he proved the next day to Seabrook. After lunching together in the grill room of the Plaza Hotel, Crowley demonstrated his new magical powers by making a man fall over on Fifth Avenue.

Crowley's next abode was a studio at 1 University Place, on the corner with Washington Square North, in Greenwich Village. The area was New York's bohemian intellectual quarter. Frank Harris lived near by, as did the Seabrooks, Eugene O'Neill, Theodore Dreiser, Sinclair Lewis, Louis Wilkinson and even Edna St Vincent Millay. Crowley felt at home in such a milieu. Here, his eccentricities were accepted, although not everyone liked him: Louis Wilkinson's wife Frances, a poet and friend of Ezra Pound, abhorred the sight of him and tried hard to undermine her husband's relationship with him.

In the winter of 1917/18, Crowley had given a lecture on magic at which he was introduced to a Swiss German woman from Bern called Alma Hirsig, who later joined a love cult run by Pierre Bernard. Some weeks later, in his studio, she introduced Crowley to her younger sister, Leah. Once again, Crowley was immediately stricken. She was 'tall and strangely thin, with luminous eyes, a wedge-like face, a poignant sadness and a sublime simplicity' and 'radiated an indefinable sweetness.'

He found her so overwhelming that, without 'wasting time on words, I began to kiss her. It was sheer instinct. She shared it and equalled my ardour. We continued with occasional interruptions, such as politeness required, to answer her sister in the rare intervals when she got out of breath.' Thirty five years old, she was one of eight children born to a dipsomaniac father whose wife had fled to America with their offspring to escape him.

A relationship between Leah Hirsig and Crowley did not immediately follow on from the breathless bout of kissing. It was another year before he met her again. By the beginning of 1919, she was enrolled on a part-time law course at New York University, on Washington Square South, seeking to better herself so she could quit her job as a schoolteacher at Public School No. 40 in the Bronx. The sisters again called on Crowley, for Leah wanted to find accommodation near the university, partly to be close to her studies and partly to be out of the school catchment area, for she had given birth to a bastard son, Hansi, the father of which had abandoned her. Having an illegitimate child could have cost her her teaching post and she had to keep it quiet.

There has been a rumour, passed down through the years among Crowley aficionados, that Hansi was Crowley's child, although both he and Leah named the father as a man called Edward Carter. From time to time, however, Leah was to refer to the boy as Hansi Crowley, implying that Crowley was his father. In November 1919, she was to write in a letter to Crowley, 'I ask nothing – I expect nothing of you except what will aid you in your work. Your baby reminds me constantly of the Beast, and I shall take good care of him . . .' The truth is otherwise. This letter, which some have misinterpreted to refer to Hansi, actually refers to Crowley's unborn child which Leah was then carrying. Clearly, they hoped it would be a boy.

As they talked in Crowley's University Place apartment, he slowly removed Leah's clothing. Alma, also present, did not mind. Both sisters were somewhat bohemian in outlook and considered themselves avant-garde. Once she was naked,

Crowley ran his eye up and down her and asked if she would pose for him, as he was a painter. She agreed. On 11 January, she came to the studio, where Crowley began to sketch her but found he could not: untrained as an artist, he just did not have the technique. Then it dawned on him. If he considered her vertically rather than horizontally, he could do it. Fired with this discovery, he set to work the next day, his creativity doubtless charged by their having had sex during the night. Sketching done, he wanted to paint her in oils on a three-part screen. The painting was called *Dead Souls*. In it, Leah

> *stood central, her head the keystone of the arch of monsters Her face is a ghastly green, her fleshless body lustreless, white with grey-blue shadows beneath the ribs. On the left-hand panel is a kneeling Negress, bestially gross, her gaze fixed adoringly on the Queen of Dead Souls. Perched on her shoulder a parrot of brilliant plumage, many hued, surveys the scene with insolent indifference On the opposite canvas is a kneeling woman huddled as if in agony, a cascade of lustreless hair tumbling to her hips Along the entire base are rows of misshapen heads, all anguish, all perversity, all banishment from the world of reasonable things is portrayed in almost endless variety The screen is grotesque, yet is undeniably a work of genius It possesses a unity. The dead souls have composed a living soul.*

Robert Winthrop Chanler, the noted American artist with a considerable society pedigree who painted Crowley's portrait, greatly admired the work and brought a large number of people to see it. There was even a feature article on Crowley the artist in a February edition of the *New York Evening World* in which his studio was described. He had by now moved into 63 Washington Square South, a large studio overlooking Washington Square Park opposite Fifth Avenue. It was richly furnished, on the one part by Leah Hirsig, who had by now solved her accommodation problem by moving in with Crowley, and on the other by disciples of Crowley and OTO members who, having set up small lodges across America, sent him money.

To give the article a certain flamboyance, Crowley told the reporter that he had, during the war, worked undercover for the British government, been shot in the leg (his slight limp, it must be remembered, was caused by phlebitis, not a firearm) and sent on a special mission to the USA. When asked how he would sum up his art, Crowley replied, 'Well, I don't know what you'd call it. But please, whatever you do, don't call me a cubist or a futurist or anything queer like that. I guess you might call me a subconscious impressionist, or something on that order. My art is really subconscious and automatic.' He admitted he had never studied art and suggested he might be an old Master because he painted dead souls.

Now established as an up-and-coming member of New York's artistic community, Crowley advertised for models. As in life, where he was fascinated by the oddities, so was it in art. He requested dwarfs, hunchbacks, tattooed women and any freaks he could find: the more deformed the better. Like these subjects, Crowley's paintings were crude and powerful, using bright primary colours (often drug influenced) and lacking any skilled draughtsmanship. The subject matter was often magical and symbolic yet stylistically naive and almost primitive – and always highly imaginative, populated by distorted faces and set in forbidding landscapes. It was as if, his literary skills on the wane, Crowley had found a new medium of creative expression.

Certainly, his literary expertise was slipping by 1919. His poetry, which had once shown much – if eccentric – promise, was now weak and derivative, often a parody of itself, and not only poorly crafted but shallow and slight. His prose writing was still good but even that was beginning to falter. What was as strong as ever was Crowley's sense of puckish humour. In the summer of that year, he sent out the following invitation: 'JULY 1st. JOYFUL CELEBRATION! The Grand Master invites the representatives of the Press, the Prohibition Movement, the Pulpit, Poetry, and the Police to join in the inaugural festival of the BENZINE JAG. 9pm. July 1. No. 63 Washington Square. Love is the law, love under will.' In the style of the hash parties

of the Swinging Sixties, Crowley was throwing a benzine bash. To experience the jag (or kick), Crowley's instructions were 'Buy an ordinary can of benzine, take a dropper, get capsules, put twenty drops of benzine in each capsule, and then take as if it were a pill.' In addition, he held anhalonium parties.

By now, Leah Hirsig was established as Crowley's mistress and next Scarlet Woman. She took part in his sexual magic rituals, which included her being inaugurated to the position by having the Mark of the Beast, a cross within a circle, painted between her breasts. Her magical name was Alostrael and her title the Ape of Thoth. At home in the studio, she frequently wandered about stark naked, making no effort to cover herself when visitors arrived. How she disposed of her infant son, Hansi, when living with Crowley is not known.

The puzzle of Crowley's love life in middle age lingers still. Despite his no longer being handsome, his misogynism, his sexual eccentricities, his consorting with prostitutes, his homosexuality, his poverty and his physical unpleasantness (which often included venereal disease as a by-product of his sexual activities), Crowley still attracted women in droves. They would live with him, cosset him, offer themselves to him, bear his children, be buggered by him, succour him and give him money. However, the women he attracted were also of a certain kind, often insecure in their own lives or members of the bohemian artistic world on the fringes of which he existed. They were frequently women who were seeking something greater in their lives than the mundane and were susceptible to Crowley, just as they were to men of the cloth who seemed to be different. There was something about Crowley, and men like him, that hinted at the Byronic mad, bad and dangerous to know, which appealed to them. In other words, Crowley and men like him were extraordinary and exciting.

Crowley was also charismatic. He was witty, erudite, educated, could be endearingly eccentric, and had a reputation that was not all bad. He may have been sexually deviant but he had been very rich, had genuinely climbed in the Himalayas and had travelled round the world in a period when such a

journey was rare. Whatever he said he had done, he was rarely lying, although he was not reluctant to embroider or exaggerate to boost his ego. Furthermore, he was plausible. Yet perhaps what finally swayed women towards him was that he understood them. He knew what they wanted and he knew how to give it to them, to pander to their vanity, to their hopes, to their desires for a thrill. It must also go without saying that, with his wide amatory experience, he was a skilful sexual partner.

Throughout the winter of 1918, spurred on by his new Scarlet Woman and artistic success, Crowley wrote a large body of magical material and started to make plans for new issues of *The Equinox* to contain it, although these were, in time, stalled and came to nothing, bar just one, now referred to by book dealers as the Blue Edition. It was published on 21 March 1919 by the Universal Publishing Company of Detroit. The contents included a colour portrait of the Master Therion, taken from a painting by Leon Kennedy, the *Hymn to Pan* Crowley had written in Moscow in 1913, and an open letter inviting OTO membership.

The publishing company was partly owned by a group of freemasons who had asked Crowley to restructure their lodge and rituals, upon which task he seems to have made a start, although he then fell out with them over the publication of *The Equinox*: it was not as well produced as he had wanted and they had argued over the costings. The whole matter was, he declared, typical of America and the Americans, whom it was impossible to rid of preconceived notions and opinions and who refused to hear the truth if it was against their interest. They were, he considered, generally social climbers and ignorant.

Once more, in the summer of 1919, Crowley went on a camping trip-cum-magical retirement, this time near Montauk at the eastern extremity of Long Island. He was exhausted and somewhat dispirited. In his tent, he assessed his last five years. They had been hard and, apart from his becoming a Magus, largely unproductive. He had not taken America by storm and assumed the whole period had been one of preparation for the future. With Leah now at his side, it

was time to regroup, summon up his inner fortitude and move on.

After the camping trip was over, he visited the Seabrooks, who were spending their summer at Decatur, now a suburb of Atlanta, Georgia. The local newspaper ran a feature on Crowley under the banner 'Poet Painter who Studied Magic Under Indian Savants'. He then went to Detroit and back to New York, settling up his affairs which, if Frank Harris is to be believed, consist of passing off a number of dud cheques.

Crowley arrived back in Britain just before Christmas 1919. He entered the country without any difficulty whatsoever. Even he must have been astounded at the facility with which he passed through immigration. He had been openly and vociferously supportive of Germany, had mixed in enemy social circles in New York, had espoused the Irish republican cause (which in itself was an indictable offence), had drawn the attention of the Home and Foreign Offices, and had been seen to destroy his passport, yet he was not so much as questioned on his return.

There are several possible explanations for this. First, Crowley really had been a British undercover agent in the USA, yet the odds for this being true are long in the extreme. If this was the case, then he had pulled off an intelligence coup like no other, completely fooling the Germans, who were not readily duped: even the famously pro-German American journalist H.L. Mencken believed that Crowley was genuinely pro-German, and he was astute in the extreme. Second, while Crowley had not been a spy *per se*, he had passed information to the American authorities, who had smoothed his predicament over with the British: it is believed, although no solid proof has emerged, that Crowley did tell the Americans that Theodor Reuss was a German agent, which it is almost certain he was. Third, the immigration authorites were merely inefficient.

Yet, the truth seems to be somewhat more simple. The British government just did not take Crowley seriously. He was famously eccentric, had done little real harm (and may, indeed, have done some good by chance) and was not worth pursuing.

In the larger picture, he was but a tiny detail. This seems borne out by a communication John Symonds had with Guy Gaunt after Crowley's death. With hindsight, Gaunt's opinion of Crowley was that he was nothing more than a 'small-time traitor' bent on self-advertisement. The official line was to leave him be to get on with his magical mumbo-jumbo.

As for the man himself, he had a clear conscience. He had played his part in the war effort and been loyal to his country.

There is a fascinating footnote to Crowley's spying game. In his diary, there is an enciphered entry for 2 February 1917. It is written in Enochian code and, roughly translated, reads 'USA ♂ Germany – success'. The following day, the USA broke off diplomatic relations with Germany. Perhaps Crowley had been applying his willpower to the task of involving America in the Great War – and pulled it off.

15

The Master of Cefalù

Crowley went straight to his aunt's house in Croydon, the one Count Zeppelin had missed, where he stayed for a couple of weeks. 'Here I am [he wrote to an acolyte] safely at home. Not only has the war changed nothing in this house of my aunt's where I have roosted, but they haven't altered the position of a piece of furniture since Queen Victoria came to the throne.' He had good reason to think he was temporarily beyond attention in this suburban backwater, but he was wrong. The authorities may have ignored him but the press was not so conveniently disposed. Within days of his return, one of Crowley's old *bêtes noires* appeared over his horizon. It was Horatio Bottomley.

Still running *John Bull*, Bottomley had gained something of a reputation himself. In 1909, while the Liberal Member of Parliament for South Hackney, he had been charged with fraud but was acquitted. Two years later, he petitioned for bankruptcy yet had been artful enough to retain a country estate and a villa in France by putting them in his wife's name. He resigned from Parliament in 1912 and, when war broke out, reinvented himself as a patriot. *John Bull* became famous for its patriotic propaganda and jingoistic journalism. By 1915, Bottomley was famous as a columnist with the *Sunday Pictorial* and, when the war ended, he had paid off his debts, stood for Parliament as an independent and took his old parliamentary seat back with a landslide victory.

Bottomley had already published a diatribe in *John Bull* against Frank Harris, but now, with Crowley back in the country, he levelled his sights and started one of the most

vituperative smear campaigns ever to have been seen in the British press. It was also one of the first examples of sensationalist, tabloid, personally invasive journalism. On 10 January 1920, *John Bull* carried the headline, 'Another Traitor Trounced – Career and Condemnation of the Notorious Aleister Crowley'. Where Bottomley's information came from is uncertain, but it is probable that he used his parliamentary position to acquire it. The article outlined what Crowley had been up to in America, called him 'scum' and demanded that the government take action. For his part, Crowley was outwardly dismissive, but inwardly he must have been concerned and annoyed. He could have applied to the courts for an injunction against Bottomley – he could even have sued him for libel – yet he did not. George Cecil Jones contacted Crowley, urging him to take action. He also involved Oscar Eckenstein, who was now ill and to die the following year, in trying to persuade Crowley to sue. Crowley stayed firm.

There was nothing for it but to let Bottomley rant on, which he did, but not for too long. He shortly afterwards fell out with a business partner who, Bottomley claimed, then libelled him. He sued and lost. During the trial, a good deal of Bottomley's private and business life was made public and an official receiver was appointed by the courts to look into his affairs. In March 1922 he was charged with fraud and, two months later, was found guilty. He was sentenced to seven years' imprisonment. Stripped of his parliamentary seat, he was released from jail in 1927 and died six years later in near poverty and obscurity. Crowley subsequently claimed that he had brought about his tormentor's downfall by magical means.

Yet the damage was done. Crowley's nefarious reputation, which had faded from public consciousness during the traumatic war years, was reborn. He would never lose it.

During the *John Bull* campaign, Crowley was not in England. On 2 January 1920, he had gone to Paris, not to escape press attention but because he felt ill at ease in the country. He was bored and hated English provincialism, parochial attitudes and safeness. He also knew, labelled as he now was a rogue,

blackguard and traitor, that he had no chance whatsoever of proclaiming the Law of Thelema, his doctrine of 'Do what thou wilt . . .', in such a hidebound nation. Furthermore, his health was failing. His frequent hand-to-mouth existence in America had weakened his constitution. He was suffering badly from asthma and bronchitis and needed a less inclement climate to winter in. So ill was he that, when in London, Crowley had visited his physician, Dr Harold Batty Shaw, who had been his doctor since 1898 and practised from a surgery in Gower Street. Shaw prescribed a drug for his patient that was known to be efficacious in the treatment of bronchial diseases. It was called heroin.

Heroin, derived from morphine, itself derived from opium, had been prescribed for respiratory ailments since the turn of the century and had been thought, at first, to be non-addictive. However, by 1910, the risk of habituation was well known. Notwithstanding, some doctors continued to prescribe it until the mid-1920s, both for respiratory problems and as a powerful painkiller. Crowley did not balk at taking the drug: he was more than experienced in drug experimentation and addiction held no worries for him. In his article on drug-taking in *Vanity Fair* in 1916, he had written, 'The only drawback to the use of drugs is that the phenomenon of tolerance is so soon set up, and the effect diminished; while for weaklings there is always the danger of the formation of a habit, when the treacherous servant becomes master, and takes toll for the boon of his ephemeral heavens by the bane of an abiding hell.' If one was strong of character and will then addiction, Crowley declared, was no problem. One only needed willpower to prevent addiction. He had proved as much himself. He had imbibed hashish, anhalonium and cocaine but was not addicted to them: even opium had not ensnared him. Yet what Crowley did not appreciate was that hashish and cocaine were psychologically, not physiologically, addictive, and opium use could be sustained at a low level without a physiological addiction occurring.

Heroin, however, was a different matter altogether. It was highly and physiologically addictive and, from early on, Crowley was unequivocally hooked.

Beyond all else lingered Crowley's pressing need for money. His assets were nothing more than his stock of unsold copies of his own work, a library of valuable occult volumes he had left at Boleskine for safe-keeping, on the assumption that he would return one day, and what equity he still retained in the house itself. In order to ascertain what he might realise in cash, Crowley had to discover what holdings the OTO in Britain possessed. When he had left Britain for America, Crowley had entrusted the financial affairs of the OTO to George Macnie Cowie, art editor of the Edinburgh publishing firm of Nelson and Grand Treasurer of the organisation. Cowie, according to Crowley, had changed during the war: at first, he had sent Crowley the odd cheque to keep him going in the USA but, since 1915, he had become fiercely anti-German and, believing Crowley to have been a traitor, he systematically – as Crowley put it – set out to rob him and the OTO of what was their due. According to Crowley, he transferred any interest in Boleskine to himself and sold off the contents. When Crowley was finally able to get hold of the accounts, he was appalled: the furniture, worth well over £1,000, had been sold for £143.

The final blow came in 1919 when Cowie sold Boleskine. The estate, which had been spasmodically let, was run down and costing more in upkeep than it could earn in rent. It was purchased by a Dorothy C. Brook of 60 North Gate, Regent's Park, London for £2,500, the sum for which Crowley had bought it all those years before. He and Leila Waddell signed the deeds over in New York. Crowley's signature reads 'Aleister Saint Edward Crowley (formerly named Aleister McGregor)'.

Not receiving a penny from the sale rankled with Crowley for years. In the late 1930s, he asked Charles Richard Cammell, a literary friend whom he first met in 1936 and who was to become his first biographer, to go to the house while visiting Scotland and find out what had happened to his library. Cammell approached the then owners of the house and discovered that all Crowley's books had been sold at auction in Inverness. In such a provincial town, they could not have realised anything like their true worth.

Rather optimistically, Crowley assessed the value of the copies of his own published works at £20,000. Most of these were in storage at the Chiswick Press, but the company would not release them until Crowley had paid a storage charge of £350 and he simply did not have this kind of money.

Accompanied by her son, Hansi, Leah arrived in Paris from Switzerland on 10 January 1920. She was by now heavily pregnant. They rented a house at Fontainebleau, where they were joined by a young woman Leah had met on the ship crossing from America. Ninette Shumway, whose maiden name had been Fraux, was French by birth but had been working in America as a governess: she was widowed, her husband having been killed in a car accident, and had a three-year-old son called Howard. When Crowley first set eyes on her, he was aghast: 'The girl was bloodless, drooping like a thirsty flower, and she dragged her brat along listlessly, he as lifeless as she. His face was ghastly white and his limbs as a damp rag.' She described herself as 'a nervous wreck on the verge of suicide.' He decided on the spot to resuscitate their lives.

Ten days later, Crowley went to Paris to buy some artist's supplies, Ninette Shumway's arrival swelling his coffers slightly. There, he met Jane Chéron, who presented him with a piece of silk upon which she had painstakingly embroidered the stele he and Rose had seen in the museum in Cairo in 1904. Crowley quizzed her about it. She claimed she had drawn the design while asleep in the south of France, where she was undergoing a cure for her opium habit, having previously seen it in an issue of *The Equinox*. Crowley, whose life seemed not to be going according to plan, immediately recognised this as a sign that he should get on with his mission in life.

His battery recharged, Crowley returned to Fontainebleau and set to work on restoring Ninette to her former self and beauty. He took her for walks in the forest and she fell under his charismatic spell. Her health improved and she entered into a *ménage à trois* with Crowley and Leah, whose pregnancy was soon to come full term.

On 26 February Leah gave birth to a girl, whom they named

Ann Léa, although she was quickly nicknamed Poupée, the suggestion being little Howard Shumway's. Soon after, Ninette, who had been taking part in sexual magic rituals, announced that she was pregnant. In fact she seems to have enjoyed her participation in the rites. In the magical diary Crowley insisted she keep, she was quite blunt in describing what she had done: Crowley remarked that it was unpublishable because she was not well educated and had no mastery of polite euphemism.

Not only did Ninette's health improve, but so did her son's, Crowley taking him and Hansi walking and rock climbing, teaching them to box and observing them with the detached air of a child developmentalist. He was fascinated to see how they approached the same problem in completely different ways. Notwithstanding, he wrote in his diary on 15 March, 'I am ready to bolt to some country where children are unknown', and he summed Hansi up with the comment, 'There's no halfway there – either a genius or a rogue.'

There was, however, more discord forming in Crowley's life than could be caused by two little boys and an infant. Ninette fell in love with Crowley and became intensely jealous of Leah. Having no concept of the Law of Thelema, and unable to understand Crowley's complex character and alternative morality, Ninette could not see how Crowley could be in love with both of them. He tried to explain how and why Leah was important to him, but it went over Ninette's head. She simply could not comprehend the magical aspects of the relationship.

Yet Crowley was preoccupied with more than capricious feminine envy. He was working on how he and Leah might found a community where initiates could practise magic and learn the basics of the Law of Thelema. The two of them had thought about this off and on for a while, but it seemed to Crowley that now was the time to try to set their ambitions in motion. Establishing the community, which would be quasi-monastic and sexually liberated, could kill several birds with one stone. It would bring in initiates and not only spread the word of *The Book of the Law* but also provide some income. Wherever it was located, it would

have to be fairly remote so that members could get on with their magical lives away from prying eyes, especially those of the press. This suggested that an ideal location would be overseas; if one was chosen in a warm climate, it would simultaneously address Crowley's health problems.

Crowley intended the community to be not just a place where his ideas were practised, but a refuge from the hypocrisy of the wider world. It would, he stated, be

> *an archetype of a new society. The main ethical principle is that each human being has his own definite object in life. He has every right to fulfil this purpose, and none to do anything else. It is the business of the community to help each of its members to achieve this aim, in consequence all rules should be made and all questions of policy decided, by the application of this principle to the circumstance. We have thus made a clean sweep of all the rough and ready codes of convention which have characterized past civilisations.*

It was Crowley's concerned belief that society was imploding. Its codes of morality were undemocratic and contrary to the spirit of individualism by which he placed much store. The only hope lay in a new religious order which permitted everyone to attain his fullest potential and achieve his true aspirations. He was aware that there was a fundamental problem underlying his suggested doctrine. Individuality such as he proposed and practised himself was a threat to the established order, which would do its utmost to undermine it: and the issue upon which it would make its most virulent attack would be that of sexual relations.

Sex, Crowley considered, was the ultimate enslavement of one individual by another. It was the greatest fundamental problem of society, present throughout life and affecting every aspect of it. He abhorred the way in which established religion, particularly Christianity, imposed its own sexual morality, which had been arrived at in response to pre-Christian paganism. The ideas of chastity, monogamy and faithfulness were, Crowley considered, contrary to the human spirit and restricted individuality.

They also took away the joy of sex, turning the act of love into 'a physical relief like defecation.' In his autobiography, Crowley stated that *The Book of the Law* addressed this fundamental problem, that 'each individual has an absolute right to satisfy his sexual instinct as is physiologically proper for him. The one injunction is to treat all acts as sacraments.'

Such an idea was preposterous in 1920, yet it has since become central to modern sexuality, the only failure being that while individuals are permitted sex in a wider number of ways – in that, for example, homosexuality is no longer criminalised – they do not consider it as sacramental. Only half of Crowley's lesson has been learned. In summary, although he was well ahead of his time in his sexual philosophy, his ideas were still partially rooted in the past. In the sexual revolution of the twentieth century, Crowley was a transitional figure present at the cusp of the Roaring Twenties. That said, he still maintained some quaintly Victorian sexual concepts. For example, he thought 'bodily secretions, suppressed, infiltrate the tissues, poisoning them. Semen unnaturally accumulated clogs the brain as bile does: morbid, mental and moral symptoms result.'

After consulting the *I Ching* (or the Chinese *Book of Changes*) on 1 March, Crowley chose the Sicilian village of Cefalù as the site of the Abbey of Thelema. Quite how this place came to be chosen over any other is unknown. Crowley frequently – sometimes several times a day – consulted the *I Ching* in making decisions, but he cannot just have plucked the name from the air. He most probably took a look at the atlas, decided on the type of area he regarded as most appropriate for his needs, both material and spiritual, and then put them to the test.

Cefalù, forty miles east of Palermo, was a small, ancient fishing port dating back to well before the time of Christ. Dominated by a magnificent Norman cathedral and the Rocca di Cefalù, a precipitous mountain topped with a megalithic ruin which the Greeks had adapted into a temple in the fifth century BC, it offered just what Crowley was seeking. The climate was pleasant, the area was historic and had the right atmosphere, the cost of living was low, and it was off the beaten track.

The decision made, Crowley moved. Leah and Poupée, leaving hospital on 8 March, went to London, where, staying with Crowley's aunt in Croydon, Leah saw to his business affairs in Britain. After staying on in Fontainebleau for a few days, Crowley, Ninette and the two little boys, Hansi and Howard, set off for Sicily, via Marseilles and Naples, where, in a room in the Hotel Metropole on 27 March, Ninette and Crowley had magical sex ('per vas nefandum') to help them on their journey. They reached Cefalù on 31 March, where, after one night in a run-down hotel, they were introduced to a house agent called Giordano Giosus, who directed them to see a building called the Villa Santa Barbara. Crowley took one look at it, immediately agreed to rent it, and set about hiring a local man as housekeeper and general factotum.

This was made possible because, by chance, Crowley had unexpectedly come into some money, inheriting about £700, which was paid to him around this time in three instalments. It was with one of these he seems to have bankrolled the founding of his monastic community. Needless to say, this temporary cash fluidity did not last long. Crowley had to keep himself, two women and three children on it, as well as meet the community's running costs. For the rest of his life, he lived for the next source of money, be it a small inheritance, a donation from disciples, friends or the OTO, or payment for a journalistic article. He resented the poverty on the borders of which he lived, and he must have rued his profligacy in early adulthood, but, with true Crowleyian stoicism, he soldiered on.

The Abbey of Thelema (which was also variously known as the Collegium ad Spiritum Sanctum or just simply the Villa Santa Barbara) came into being on 2 April, when Crowley, Ninette and the boys took possession of the house. Leah arrived twelve days later from London with Poupée, who was poorly. Together, Crowley and Leah signed the lease on the villa, she calling herself the Contessa Lea Harcourt, while Crowley signed as Sir Alastor de Kerval. Expensive stationery was designed and printed, both Crowley and Leah having business cards made: his read '*The Beast* 666 while hers was in the name of '*The Scarlet*

Woman Alostrad 31–666–31. The address was given as The Abbey of Thelema.

That the setting of the house was idyllic is an understatement. Villa Santa Barbara overlooked Cefalù from a hillside about half a mile away. As Crowley enthusiastically noted in his diary and, later, incorporated into his novel *The Diary of a Drug Fiend*, cliffs towered over the house,

> *torn into huge pinnacles and gullies, but above the terrific precipices we could see the remains of successive civilisations; Greek temples, Roman walls, Saracen cisterns, Norman gateways, and houses of all periods were perishing slowly on the gaunt, parched crags . We are high on the neck of the peninsula, and can see West to Palermo, East over the sea North is the mighty rock of Cephaloedium* [the ancient name for Cefalù] *and behind us to the South rise hills, green with trees and grass My garden is full of flowers and the promise of fruit*

Below the house, near a hamlet called La Kalura, was a rocky peninsula from which they could swim. All around were groves of gnarled olive trees, through which an access path wound towards the house from the coast road. There were even two Persian nut trees in the grounds, like those Crowley remembered growing at the Villa Caldarazzo in 1911.

The setting was beautiful but the house was otherwise. It was little more than a large oblong farmhouse, built in stone with thick walls under a pantiled roof. It was of one storey construction with six chambers, five of them radiating off a large central room. It had no electricity or gas, no sanitation, and only the well provided water. The furniture was at best rustic and there was little of it. Laundry and bathing were conducted in public in the courtyard. Thrown in with the price of the rent was a nanny-goat to provide milk.

Crowley soon adapted the building to his purpose. The central room was made into the temple. In the middle stood a multi-coloured, six sided altar about three feet high on which, surrounded by candles, were kept *The Book of the Law* and assorted magical accoutrements such as a bell, a chalice, a sword and a

dish containing Cakes of Light. Next to *The Book of the Law* was the Record, a diary of events in the community and rites carried out in the temple. The floor was made of terracotta tiles upon which, around the altar, was painted a dark red circle within which was a pentagram in blue. At one point of this was a throne upon which Crowley sat; in front was a brazier in which incense was burned. At the other four points of the pentagram were low three-legged stools.

Within days, Crowley was hard at work writing, conducting rituals, engaging in sex magic with Leah and Ninette, rock-climbing, walking on the mountains, painting and making plans. He also took a considerable cocktail of drugs for both magical and medicinal reasons. For the first time in a long while, Crowley felt contented. In his autobiography, he wrote of this time, 'I care nothing for public opinion. I care nothing for fame or success. I am perfectly happy in my retirement. The full leisure to work, the freedom from all interruption, the absence of temptations to distractions: Cefalù realizes my idea of heaven.'

Over the next few years, his literary and magical output was prodigious. He researched all manner of magical matters, rewrote essays, kept detailed diaries, compiled a commentary on *The Book of the Law* and revised part three of *Book Four*. In addition, he kept up a correspondence with hundreds of people all over the world. He even considered going into self-publishing again, and looked into buying a hand press with the intention of producing illuminated manuscripts selling at ten guineas each, with lithographs to follow. This plan was, however, ditched: Crowley must have realised that vanity publishing was little more than a means of throwing money to the wind.

When Crowley was not writing or attending to matters magical, he painted. His pictures were still technically naive but they were becoming more interesting and sensitive, the draughtsmanship improving with practice. Not all his paintings, however, were on canvas or wood. He also set about filling the house walls with murals. Some of these were obscene pictures of sex magic. One depicted a man being sodomised by the god

Pan, his semen splashing over an acquiescent Scarlet Woman. Others were described by Crowley in his diary as a blonde lady and her Negro lover, nine lovers of various species watched by a spotted dog and a bowl of newly invented fishes, long-legged lesbians and a Tahitian girl and her Eurasian lover. The object of these sexual paintings was to acclimatise visitors to the prevailing attitude towards it. 'In the Abbey of Thelema at Cefalù [Crowley proclaimed] sex is studied scientifically without shame or subterfuge. Passions are physiologically assayed; all acts are allowed, if they injure not others; approved, if they injure not self. This liberty, far from fomenting lust, destroys sex obsession.' Contrary to the legend that has sprung up about Cefalù, nothing like all the pictures were sexual in nature. Many were fantasy landscapes or pictures Crowley received in dreams. As most of his dreams were affected by drugs, the colours of the paintings were often lurid and primary.

From time to time, Crowley went to Palermo by train, shopping for supplies, visiting prostitutes or purchasing drugs from a dealer he had contacted called Amatore. He sometimes stayed overnight in the Hotel des Palmes and, less frequently, took the ship to Naples for a day or two of whoring. He may have been happy at Cefalù but he was also occasionally bored with his two women companions and their noisy offspring. And then there was their mutual jealousy.

Ninette had been jealous of Leah from the beginning but Leah was herself the jealous sort. She would go into a rage if she saw Crowley eyeing another woman, while Ninette at least once threatened Crowley with one of the loaded revolvers that lay around the villa, ready to repulse Sicilian bandits should they have descended from the hills. On 20 April, Crowley intended to hold a sex magic rite with both Leah and Ninette, whom he referred to as the First Concubine of The Beast, His Scarlet Woman and the Second Concubine respectively. In the middle of the ceremony, the two women started quarrelling. Ninette ran out of the villa in tears. Crowley went after her. Searching the mountainside, he found her about an hour later and brought her back to find Leah drunk on cognac. The two, both equally

jealous of the other, started fighting. Crowley left them to it and took refuge in his opium pipe.

The following day, jealousy was temporarily set aside over concern for Poupée. The infant was not eating and was beginning to waste away. Crowley, very worried about the baby's health, telegraphed Naples for some gripe water. He cast her horoscope again and again but could find nothing positive in it. That Crowley loved the child is indisputable: he said as much in his diary. Yet he was at a loss as to what to do, feeling powerless in the face of her illness.

For the two little boys, life was fun. They had the run of the villa and surrounding area, fondly called Crowley Old Beast, and went swimming, walking and rock-climbing with him. Crowley's idea of early education was to let them find their own wills. It was essential, he believed, to allow them to develop their individuality, which formal education sought to suppress. Intellectual stimuli should be given to them as much as possible, but not forced upon them. He thought there was no value in teaching as such but, once a child showed curiosity in a subject, he should then have it explained to him in detail. Both boys were permitted to observe in full the sexual magic rituals which Crowley said would help eradicate any sexual repression they might have been developing in their puerile psyches.

Once they attained their wills, Crowley said they never cried, lied or got in the way: he nevertheless still had to occasionally escape from the cloying atmosphere of women and children. Leah's sister, Alma, was of a different opinion. She thought the boys were wild little demons who, if they ever found their true wills, discovered they were nasty. Hansi was a chain-smoker by the age of five and referred to himself as Beast Number 2.

It was not long before visitors started to arrive at the villa. They found life at Cefalù to be both incredibly liberated – and liberating – yet interspersed with strictly observed ritual practices. Most people spent their time reading, walking or swimming, imbibing drugs and having sex with each other, both in and out of a ritual context. The house itself was a mess. The children roamed at will, dogs (including one Crowley had

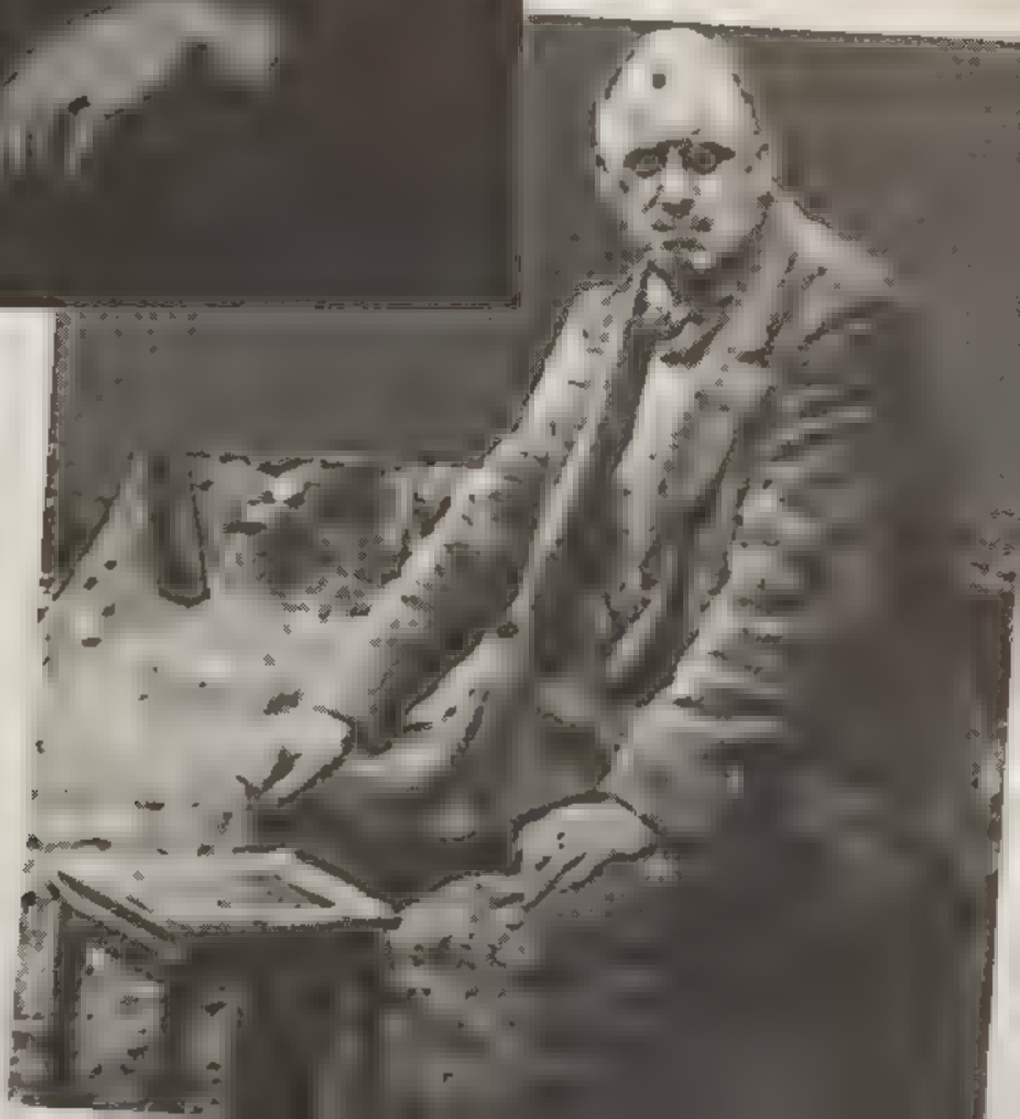
acquired which he whimsically called Satan) wandered in and out, and the floors were a litter of bottles and ritual equipment. Not surprisingly, the locally employed housekeeper, who was, like most Sicilians, a devout Catholic, did not stay long. After his departure, no one kept house. The food was nourishing but of poor quality because no one wanted to be cook. True will did not include establishing a rota of domestic responsibility.

There was a course of study which visitors and residents had to follow, devised by Crowley, but most people ignored it or merely paid it lip service. Those who were members of the A∴A∴ were permitted to wear their own regalia at ceremonies but others were obliged to wear a hooded, loose-fitting, bright blue vestment rather like a moo-moo or academic gown, with wide sleeves. With the arms held horizontal, it was supposed to hang to form a letter *T* The gown was lined with scarlet and held in place by a golden girdle. The men were supposed to shave their heads except for a single tuft above the forehead, as Crowley did, while the women dyed their hair with henna. Everyone was obliged to maintain a personal magical diary which was open to all to read.

The day began at dawn, when Leah rang a gong summoning everyone to a prayer service to Ra, the Sun. A magical grace was said before breakfast which, consisting of goat's cheese, bread and coffee, was eaten in silence. The grace, which Crowley called the Will, went: 'Do what thou wilt shall be the whole of the Law. What is thy Will? It is my will to eat and drink. To what end? That my body may be fortified thereby. To what end? That I may accomplish the Great Work. Love is the Law, love under will. Fall to!' The rest of the day was open except for rituals at set times and further supplications to Ra at noon, in the evening and at midnight. Every now and then, Crowley conducted a Gnostic Mass during which everyone drank a goblet of wine and ate Cakes of Light. The main meal was at midday, with supper served just before sunset after which there were readings from *The Book of the Law*. Wine was frequently served and, unlike the food, was always of superior quality.

In addition to ordinary outdoor pursuits, Crowley invented

Leah Hirsig in New York, 1919

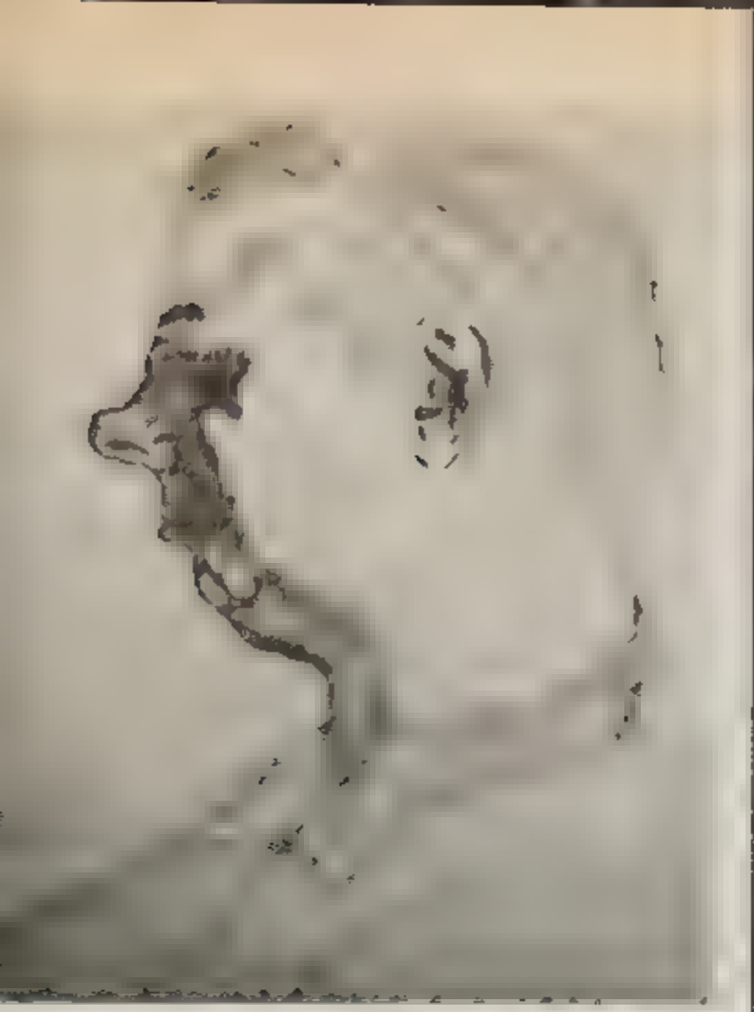


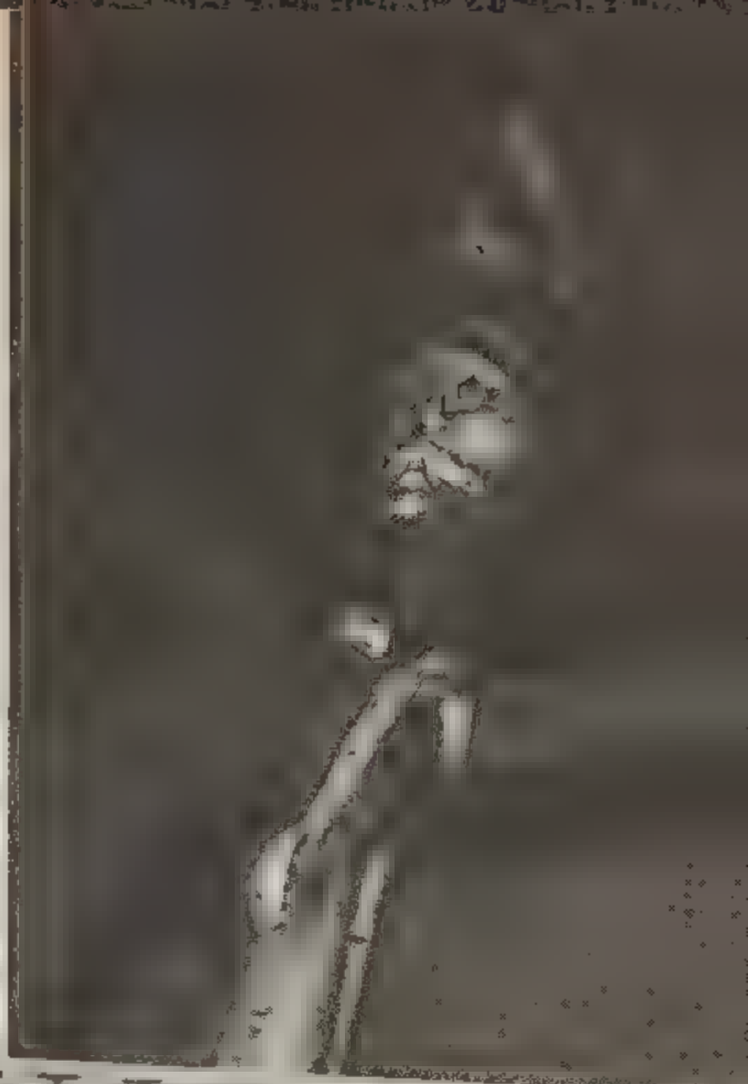
Crowley the artist in America, 1919: one of the few pictures clearly showing his central tuft of hair

Left Crowley and Leah at Cefalù in 1920: the two little boys are Howard Shumway and Hansi (in a hat). Leah is holding Poupée

Below left Jane Wolfe and Leah at Cefalù

Below right Frederick Charles 'Raoul' Loveday





bove left Norman
Mudd, an unflattering
ortrait by Crowley

bove right The head
f Crowley's bronze
nagical wand: the
vords beneath the
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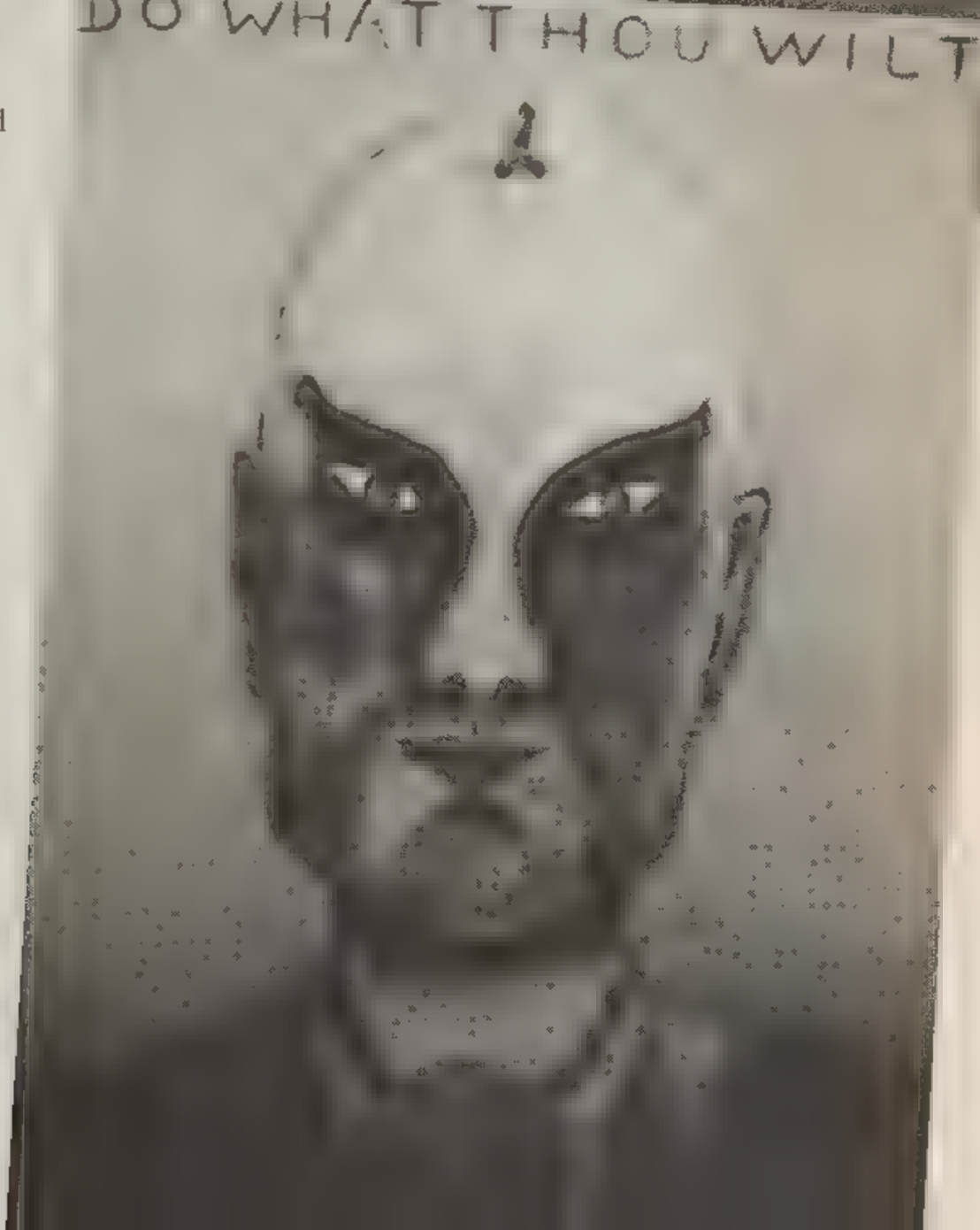
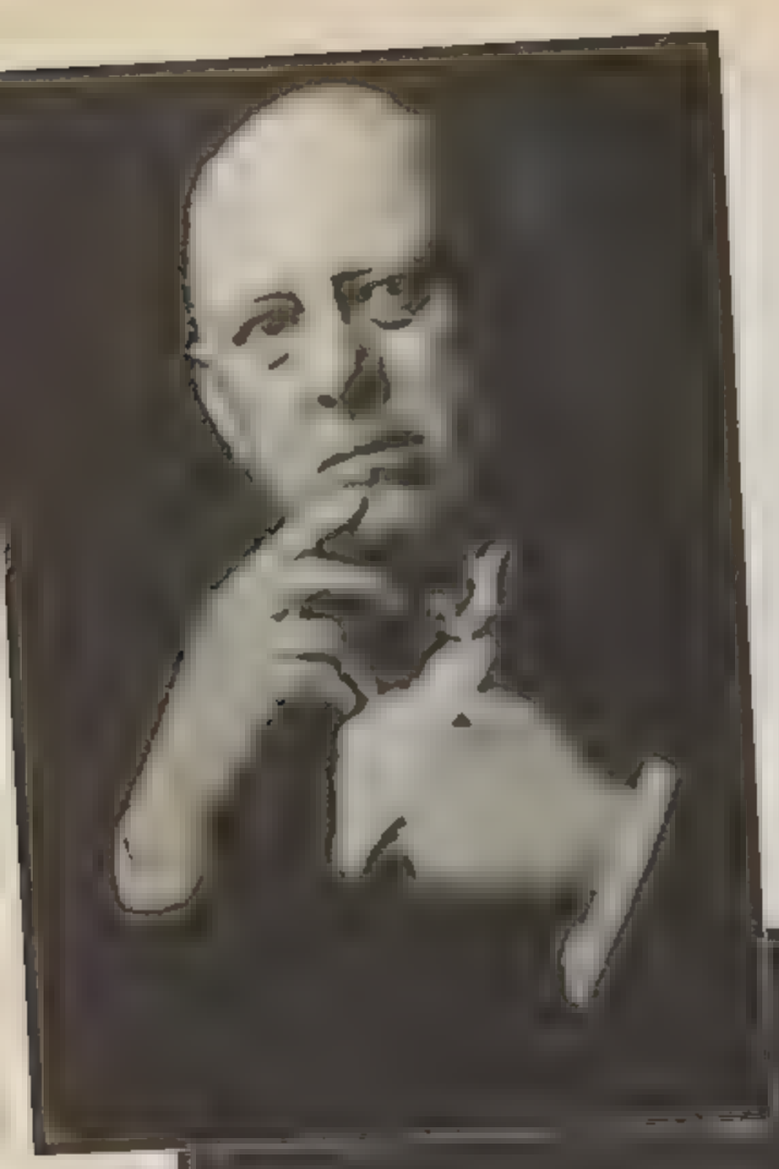




Left Crowley in middle age

Below Crowley and Maria Teresa Sanchez (née Ferrari) on their wedding day

Geheimes Staatspolizeiamt

Berlin SW 68, den 13. Februar 1935

Tgb. Nr. II A 2 - 6[illegible]/1

Fall 1731 Stu

Vorführung 18/2 Nachm.

An den

Schriftsteller Karl Johannes Germer,

Wohnort: Gotha, Querstr. 8

Gegenwärtig.

Auf Grund des § 1 der VO. des Herrn Reichspräsidenten zum Schutz von Volk und Staat vom 28.2.1933 (RGBl I S.83) ordne ich hiermit die Schutzhaft bis auf weiteres an.

G r ü n d e:

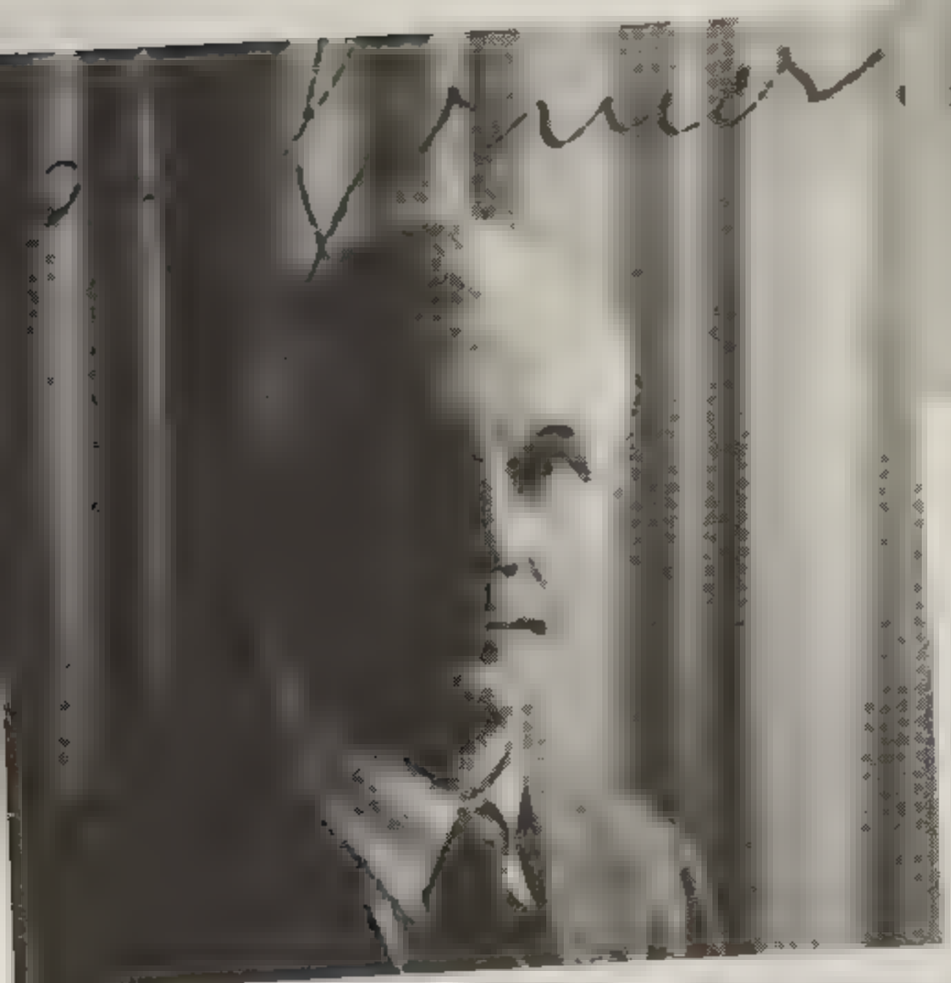
Sie haben durch die ständige Verbindung mit dem im Ausland lebenden Hochgradfreimaurer Crowley dessen staatsfeindliche Umtriebe unterstützt und durch die Verbreitung seiner Lehre versucht, in Deutschland Anhänger für ihn zu werben.

In Vertretung

gez.: F l a s c h e.

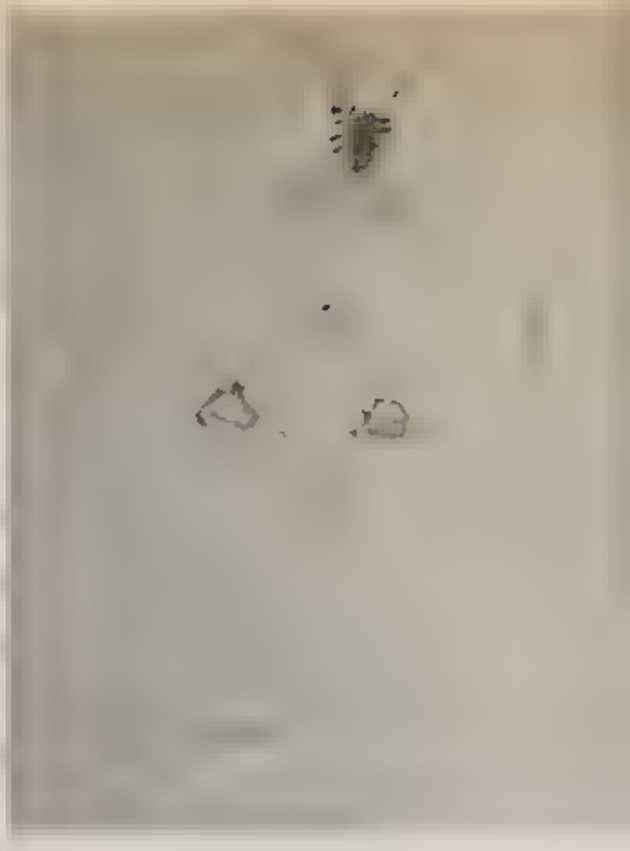
Beglaubigt:

Kanzleiangestellte.



Above Germer's Gestapo arrest warrant: he is accused of disseminating Crowley's teachings

Left Karl Germer



Above An example of Crowley's (often erotic) wit: the picture is inscribed *The Airman's Manual – Objective of Nose Dive*

Left Crowley (right) and Pearl Brooksmith

Below Crowley with a friend and Lady Frieda Harris (at the car door)

One of the Crowley-Harris tarot cards

Crowley and his son, Randall Gair

Above Netherwood in the Ridge, Hastings

Left Aleister Crowley at Netherwood

a sport conducted in the courtyard of the villa. Called the 'Game of Thelema', it was played with a football and vaguely resembled a fives game, the courtyard being marked out like a fives court. Any part of the body could be used to connect with the ball and the game was both fast and exhausting.

Drugs were, of course, freely available. Crowley preached that the only way to be liberated from drugs was to take them at will and master them by the application of Will. There were not, as the press later speculated, drug orgies, but cocaine and hashish were in considerable abundance. Anyone who overindulged, however, was castigated by Crowley for abusing the drug rather than using it to further spiritual growth.

Despite this laid back attitude towards substance use and abuse, Crowley was very worried about drugs, but kept this largely to himself. His concern centred on his own heroin addiction. He knew he was hooked and was both ashamed of and annoyed at the fact: he tried not infrequently to kick the habit but, on each occasion, his asthma returned with a vengeance and he turned to heroin for relief. For all this, however, he did not hold back from giving heroin to others. In May 1920, Leah received a dose from him to help her sleep through a bad fever. Two months later, Crowley wrote in his diary of taking a dose to keep Leah company.

At Cefalù, Crowley was often ill: throughout his life he was never truly healthy but, in Sicily, he was occasionally particularly run down. In addition to his bronchial ailments, he was prone to retching, slept badly, suffered fevers and frequently had diarrhoea. His skin periodically itched, a sign of early heroin withdrawal. The Sicilian climate may have been conducive to good health but conditions in the villa were far from hygienic, the food was poor, and Crowley's heavy drug intake did not help.

Although he was addicted to heroin and fond of hashish, Crowley's main drug at Cefalù was cocaine. It was not physiologically addictive yet Crowley was afraid that he had become habituated to it as well as to heroin. On 25 May, he wrote in his diary, 'I feel rationally the possibility of a physical craving beginning to assert itself.' His dilemma increased over time, for

he was taking cocaine for magical purposes, to assert his will, and yet, he asked himself, 'Which is stronger, my will or the drug? I must prove myself the master. How do I do this? By taking cocaine!' From his diaries, it is clear he experienced the full gamut of cocaine's offerings: he found it exhilarating and its stimulus aided his creativity yet, again, it made him depressed and lethargic. What it did not do, as it did to many users, was make him paranoid. On 12 July, he directed a sexual magic session at his mastery of cocaine and proposed locking his supply up to force him into an attempt to give it up. Yet he could not resist it. Nine days later, he recorded a severe nosebleed as he woke up. The cocaine, and everything else he was snorting or sniffing, was destroying his nasal cavity. In August, he noted that he and Leah had gone through a litre of ether whereas they usually used a tenth of that.

Leah's relationship with Crowley, as his Scarlet Woman, was of utmost importance to him. He believed that the Great Goddess dwelt within her and, by associating physically (that is, sexually) with her, he was in touch with the deity. He took an oath of obedience to Leah, in her capacity as Alostrael or his Scarlet Woman, who then exercised it by making him carry out a few humiliating acts to prove himself. He allowed her to burn him with cigarette butts and she made him eat her own shit. Despite this, he declared, 'I love Alostrael; she is all my comfort, my support, my soul's desire, my life's reward, my dream's fulfilment', for she was vital to his magical work. She was the medium through whom he was in contact with the astral plane. In the late summer, it was decided that they should direct their sexual magic towards getting her pregnant again, with Aiwass being incarnated into her foetus.

Characteristically, Leah and Ninette were not the only women towards whom Crowley had romantic or magical notions. He wrote proposing marriage to Helen Hollis (aka the Snake): she rejected him. In March 1920, shortly before leaving Paris for Cefalù, a sexual magic ritual conducted with Ninette had been aimed at 'success with Aimée Gouraud', a rich widow whom Crowley had met in both Britain and America: she, too, declined an offer of marriage.

Yet there was one woman who really caught Crowley's attention and imagination. She was a silent movie actress from

Hollywood called Jane Wolfe, a star of more than thirty one- and two-reelers, who had been studying his writings and corresponding with him since 1917, but they had never met. Over this period he had become, in her mind, the master for whom she was looking, who could save her from herself. For his part, Crowley, fond of going to the cinema, envisaged her being a wispy, frail young beauty. What was certainly frail about her was her personality. She took veronal and was on occasion suicidal. By 1920 her letters had taken on a romantic twist, and Crowley invited her to Cefalù. Possibly, he thought, she might be his next Scarlet Woman.

Crowley did not invite Jane Wolfe directly to Sicily but asked her to meet him at Bou Saâda on the summer solstice. He thought this would test her, but it also gave him a chance to get to know her without Leah and Ninette being there. He left Cefalu on 22 June, but then he changed his mind and cabled her to meet him in Tunis, where he went to conduct some homosexual magic with compliant Arab youths. The cable never reached Jane Wolfe, who travelled to Bou Saâda and waited for days in the scorching heat for her master to arrive. In the meantime, Crowley gave up on her and returned to Sicily on 10 July. Finally, tired of the desert, Jane Wolfe headed for Sicily herself, arriving in Palermo on 23 July to be met by Leah.

First appearances were not encouraging. Leah was dressed in a dirty black dress and looked in need of a good bath. When she introduced Jane Wolfe to Crowley, he was wearing gaudy clothes, was hung about with a large number of bangles, and sported earrings: he had had his ears pierced the day after returning from Tunis.

The next day, they all took the train to Cefalù, then walked up through the olive groves to the abbey. Jane Wolfe was very disappointed in it. The place was 'physically filthy, and as the day wore on, I became aware of the foul miasma enveloping the place; it steamed to high heaven. I could not breathe.' Just as disappointed was Crowley in her. She was not what he had expected in a film star. A glamorous young beauty she was not. For a start, she was six months older than him, with

a somewhat masculine haircut and of stocky build. She wore brogues and tweed skirts. Crowley's assumption that she was younger was based upon her having lied about her age, which threw his astrological reading for her seriously awry. When he cast a new horoscope, he discovered that her love for him was actually a thirst for knowledge. She was not destined to be the next Scarlet Woman – in fact, it is doubtful if she ever had even ritual sex with Crowley – but she was serious about her magical studies.

No sooner had Jane Wolfe arrived than Crowley initiated her into the A∴A∴, teaching her yoga and how to smoke opium. She was scandalised by the behaviour of her fellow Thelemites, as the members of the community called themselves, but in time came to accept it. Crowley erected a simple hut for her not far from the villa, stripped her of her possessions and clothing, gave her a woollen robe, a pencil and a notebook in which to write her magical diary, and isolated her. No one was allowed to visit her but, at night, Howard was sent to leave her her next day's rations of grapes, bread and water. For several weeks, as Neuburg had in Boleskine, she was to suffer considerable discomfort, but, in time, she came to accept it and ended her isolation with a sense of deep calm and inner peace. Thereafter, she stayed at the abbey almost as long as Crowley did himself, acting as his secretary, helping paint some of the non-erotic murals and trying to keep some semblance of domestic cleanliness and order.

In September 1920 Crowley and Leah, who was again pregnant, sailed to Naples. Crowley needed to see a dentist and Leah an optician. After a brief visit to Capri, they returned to Cefalù and tragedy. Poupée, who had been consistently unwell from birth, took a turn for the worse. She was taken to hospital in Palermo where she died on 14 October. Crowley was disconsolate. Six days later, the tragedy was compounded by Leah miscarrying her baby. It would have been a boy, Crowley's first son and the vehicle for Aiwass. From this misery, Crowley concluded that he should no longer dwell in the past or plan for the future: life was transitory and concerned only the present. He decided to concentrate on his mission to spread the Law

of Thelema, giving his love not to a few chosen people but to mankind.

Distraught at her loss, Leah became uncontrollable and accused Ninette, who was herself eight months pregnant by Crowley, of magically causing the miscarriage. Crowley got hold of Ninette's magical diary to see if this was the case. What she had written profoundly shocked him. 'I am [he wrote in his diary] utterly appalled at the horrors of the human heart. I never dreamed such things were possible.' Consequently, on 5 November, Crowley banished Ninette from Cefalù until her own child was born. She did not have to wait long. On 26 November, she was delivered of a daughter whom they called Astarte Lulu Panthea, her first name being that of the whore Crowley had been in a previous incarnation.

A few days previously, Cecil Frederick Russell, who had been one of Crowley's first A∴A∴ initiates in America and had visited him in New York in the summer of 1918, arrived at the villa. Formerly a rating in the US Navy and an orderly in the naval hospital at Annapolis, Russell had been dismissed from military service for overdosing on cocaine after reading Crowley's accounts of drugs and magic in *The Equinox*. To his detriment, Russell was unpolished. Crowley remarked that he had 'a husk of 100% American vulgarity which conceals a Great Adept.' He could be dour and was prone to sulk, but he was also well versed in Crowley's work, much of which he had learn by heart. When faced with any authority, he rebelled and violently lost his temper: it was this trait Crowley hoped to exorcise from him at the abbey. Inevitably, this put Russell and Crowley at loggerheads, two egos psychologically slogging it out. They argued frequently, Crowley watching Russell's arrogance destroying his character and making him introverted and devious.

One of their main contretemps concerned homosexual magic. Crowley began a series of sexual rituals with Leah and Russell but the latter was reluctant. Crowley recorded what happened in his magical diary: 'After dinner, we sent for Genesthai [Russell's magical name]. Circa 11pm Opus V.

Genesthai in ano meo. Alostrael had to masturbate Genesthai to effect erection, and her hand introduced his penis into my anus. Orgasm very strong and savage. Elixir nearly all absorbed; Alostrael, to whom I offered it, could only get a few drops.' In his autobiography Russell, who was heterosexual by nature and disliked any homosexuality, stated curtly, 'your [Crowley's] Circean enchantment didn't give me a bone-on', to which he added, 'Ethyl Ether is no aphrodisiac.'

Russell remained at Cefalù for about a year, but his presence was a disappointment. Crowley had expected great things from him, perhaps even hoping he might have been his magical son, but his ambitions did not materialise and, although Russell stayed in touch by letter, he and Crowley were no longer close, either personally or magically. From Sicily, Russell returned to America, where, in the early 1930s, he founded his own occult society, the Choronzon Club, the rituals of which were a bastardised version of OTO and Golden Dawn material cobbled together with a bit of sexual magic.

Over the winter of 1920, the money started to dry up again. In the new year, Crowley departed for Paris on what amounted to a fund-raising mission, leaving Leah in charge at Cefalù. Ninette, having now had her baby, was allowed back into the community, Crowley ordering the two women not to fall out in his absence.

In Paris, Crowley was introduced by Nina Hamnett to John Sullivan, a mathematician and scientific contributor to *The Times*, and his partner, Sylvia. Crowley and Sullivan hit it off immediately. They spent a fortnight meeting almost every day as Crowley divulged his philosophy, with which Sullivan was fascinated, and introduced the pair of them to sexual magic. Sullivan and Sylvia were a disparate couple and there were problems of a sexual nature in their relationship which, albeit unintentionally, Crowley seems to have cured. It was mooted by Crowley that Sylvia return to Cefalù with him, and matters might have progressed further had Sylvia not become pregnant, although by whom is unclear: certainly, Crowley had sex with her in the course of an 'instructive' ritual. Sullivan

reconsidered Crowley's offer to go to Cefalù and demurred. Crowley dismissed the matter by declaring that he had sympathy for Sylvia yet 'she did not much matter. She was one of millions in a similar plight.'

Crowley may have lost the Sullivans for the abbey but, by the time he returned to Sicily on 6 April, he had gained other recruits in Mary Butts, an English novelist, and her friend, Cecil Maitland. Even so, Crowley was disillusioned and at a low point. His finances still fell far short of his needs and his heroin addiction depressed him. He knew his willpower was the only way to break the drug's hold on him, and he walked the mountains and painted to try to control it: yet he failed. He even thought self-discipline at the abbey was sliding. Too many of the occupants were treating the place like a holiday villa, and he roused everyone to take part in more magic.

At the time, Crowley's own magical career took a leap. He reached the magical grade of Ipsissimus, the ultimate level above Magus, which freed him from the restrictions of good and evil and essentially made him omnipotent. This realisation, and his taking the required oath of secrecy, scared him, but that hardly held him back. He told none of the others that he had achieved this position, although he must have shared the secret with his Scarlet Woman, for it meant he was now a god and rid of human individuality. Whenever he penetrated her from now on, she was not fornicating with a man but a deity.

The god did not take to Mary Butts and Cecil Maitland when they arrived. He described Mary Butts as 'pompous, pretentious and stupid', and called her 'a large white red-haired maggot.' In fact, she was twenty-eight years old, an extrovert and pretty. She was also manipulative and coquettish, and enjoyed winding people up. Her interest in magic, as Crowley was soon to divine, went little further than amused curiosity, yet he thought he could bring discipline and calm to what he perceived as their muddled lives.

Maitland's muddled life almost ended within days of his arrival. He had once fallen overboard from a ship riding at anchor off Ceylon and, not being able to swim, had developed

a terrified aversion to deep water. Crowley took him down to the rocky promontory below La Kalura, they stripped off, then Crowley led him well out of his depth along the rocks, holding on to them. At this juncture, Crowley abandoned Maitland and swam back. Maitland, in panic-stricken terror, clambered up the barnacle-strewn rocks and, barefoot and stark naked, made his way back to where they had left their clothes. It took him an hour. He arrived bruised, grazed, bleeding and exceedingly annoyed. To Crowley, this was a first step in bringing Maitland back to himself, to regaining his manly dignity.

It is certain that Crowley had had plans for Maitland. He gave him the responsibility of 'baking' the Cakes of Light and, when he finally admitted defeat and left with Mary Butts, Crowley was saddened. A man of talent was, he thought, once again, being wasted on a woman.

Both Mary Butts and Maitland witnessed a number of ritual events at Cefalù which shocked them. It was one thing to partake in the rite of preparing the Cakes of Light, in which Crowley, in a scarlet-and-black robe, sacrificed a cockerel for its blood, but quite another to participate in bestiality.

One of the rituals Crowley devised included a naked Leah being mounted by a billy-goat. The idea was that Leah went down on all fours so that the goat could copulate with her. At the moment of its orgasm, Crowley would slit its throat. All went well until the goat steadfastly refused to play its sexual part. Notwithstanding, while its forequarters were over Leah's hips, Crowley garrotted it. The blood sprayed over Leah's back. She, somewhat bemused and no doubt drugged, stood up and asked Mary Butts what she should do next. Leah must have expected a magical instruction, but Mary's tacit reply suggested instead that she have a bath.

Mary Butts and Maitland left Cefalù on 16 September after staying about twelve weeks. They had not enjoyed their visit and later confessed that they thought their health had been broken there. Also, they both came away drug addicts.

While Crowley considered them failures, Frank Bennett was to prove a considerable success. Already a member of the

Theosophical Society, from which he felt he gained nothing, he had first contacted Crowley in 1909 to ask if magic could kill both his pain and the voices he heard in his head. He became a member of the OTO and the A∴A∴, taking the magical name of Frater Progradior. However, before 1914, he emigrated to Australia, where he worked as a bricklayer. Now Crowley invited him to Cefalù.

Bennett's arrival on 17 July presented a dilemma. The villa was full, the community consisting of Crowley, Leah and her son, Ninette and her two children, Jane Wolfe, Mary Butts, Cecil Maitland and Cecil Russell. Crowley decided that Russell would have to give up his quarters to Bennett, who was his senior both in age – he was in his fifties – and in magic. Russell, never one to take authority lying down, went into a huff. Crowley then suggested that Russell might like to live in Palermo for a while. Russell, considering this a banishment, flew into a rage, stormed out and scaled the Rocca di Cefalù. Ninette went after him with some food and water to find him in a ruined hovel. He refused these, saying he had sworn not to touch food or water for eight days. The following morning, Russell appeared in the villa, hurled his magical diary at Crowley, and marched off down to Cefalù to have a shave at a barber's shop. The story goes that, as the barber was lathering his face, Russell leapt from the chair and fled: he had suddenly remembered his oath not to touch water.

How the domestic arrangements were eventually sorted out is unknown, although Jane Wolfe taking a temporary magical retirement on the beach, living in Crowley's Himalayan climbing tent, might have helped somewhat. It was not an easy time for her, however. The locals, assuming she had been cast out of the villa because she was either contagious or infectious, took to stoning her. One of the missiles tore through the tent canvas, giving her a nasty gash on the head.

Crowley had a high opinion of Bennett. He stated, 'He has my respect and affection as no other of my Brethren: for he represents to me mankind incarnate at its weakest (and therefore strongest) and noblest (and therefore most "common.")' When

he arrived at the abbey Bennett was, Crowley noted, 'weary of life, despairing of truth.' He was sent off on a brief magical retirement for a few days from which he reappeared rejuvenated and at peace with himself.

It was hard work teaching Bennett magic. He was a pleasant man but no intellectual and he had difficulty grasping concepts: Crowley likened teaching him the qabala to pushing a donkey up a hill. For his part, Bennett wrote in his diary, 'I am determined that [Crowley] shall not be disappointed in me; for I will spend the rest of my life in spreading his teaching.' He admired his master considerably and with justification, for Crowley was successful in overcoming his acolyte's psychological problems and, when he returned to Australia, Crowley genuinely missed him.

By the end of 1921, despite having hardly sufficient money to live on, Crowley had the grandiose idea of erecting a new, purpose-built Abbey of Thelema. The main temple was to be circular, with a glass dome and outer courtyards and buildings dedicated to different magical purposes. It would cost £5,000. To finance it, Crowley approached the Baron la Calce, a director of a savings and loan bank in Palermo, the Casa di Risparmio. Not surprisingly, the bank rejected this investment opportunity, despite the fact that the baron was also Crowley's landlord at the villa and not averse to joining in the sexual fun from time to time.

Through the winter of 1921, visitors came and went. A man called John Stenning turned up. Ninette's twin sister, Mimi, arrived with Helen Fraux, twenty years older than her two siblings. The former, intimidated and overpowered by Crowley's personality, did not stop long although, some time later, she went to America, where she married Russell. Helen Fraux, who was a particularly bitter spinster, took against Crowley in no uncertain terms. Her enmity became such that, after a month or so, Crowley ordered her to leave. In response, she took the train to Palermo and called on the police, to whom she swore an affidavit outlining all the scandalous things that were going on in the villa. The local police raided the abbey. Even the regional

Sottoprefetto (under-prefect) came along in person, but saw nothing illegal going on. Thwarted, Helen Fraux headed home, Crowley noting in his diary for 7 January 1922, 'the Bowels of the Abbey moved at last and H. Fraux was evacuated'.

With the winter weather setting in, Crowley's bronchitis, and therefore his asthma, grew worse and his heroin use rose. He was taking several doses just to start the day off, with frequent snack doses thereafter, totalling up to five grains *per diem*. In addition, he was using cocaine at least three times a week as well as inhaling ether, which only aggravated his respiratory problems. He took long walks to try to escape heroin but he always returned to it, listless and restive, eager for a fix.

In February 1922, Crowley and Leah travelled third class to France. They were searching for new members for the abbey, and the finance they would inject into it, but Crowley had another reason for going. Leaving Leah in Paris, he went to Fontainebleau and took a room in an *auberge* called the Cadran Bleu. 'I, the Beast 666,' Crowley announced in his diary, 'wishing to prove the strength of my Will and the degree of my courage, have poisoned myself for the last two years and have succeeded finally in reaching a degree of intoxication such that the withdrawal of the drugs produces a terrible attack of the "Storm Fiend".' This was Crowley's name for an asthmatic attack, after the demon which the Himalayan hillfolk believed caused avalanches on Kanchenjunga.

Settled in the *auberge*, Crowley embarked upon a programme to kick his addiction. He went for long walks around Fontainebleau and took alternating hot and cold baths which were considered a means of breaking an opiate habit. Not surprisingly, he went through withdrawal symptoms. He was violently sick, suffered from diarrhoea and stomach cramps, his eyes wept and he could not sleep. Once he stopped taking heroin, he had to attack his bronchitis, which he did with throat pastilles, compresses and mouth swabs, but they did little. Every now and then, in desperation after a violent coughing fit that left him dog tired, he took a small dose of heroin. Realising he was in a bad way, Crowley contacted a local doctor, Edmund Gros,

for help. He prescribed a course of luminal and recommended a sanatorium, but Crowley could barely afford the luminal, never mind hospital treatment.

As a relief from his self-imposed regimen, Crowley visited Paris every week to meet friends and, where he could, have sex. One of his triumphs was Aimée Gouraud, whose long-awaited seduction was noted in his diary – 'My message was "Conquer" and I did.' He was also called upon by a young Englishman called Augustine Booth-Clibborn, to whom he outlined the Law of Thelema, suggesting he go to Cefalù and be initiated into the A∴A∴. The young man seemed keen so Crowley prepared a pledge for him to sign but, presented with it, he balked. Crowley's demands for money put him off: indeed, Crowley had already worked out how much he should cable his family to send. With the young man lost, Crowley wrote in his diary, 'He was too cowardly to sign this. He was premeditating treachery and swindling me: but he feared terribly.' Yet the truth was that Crowley was getting desperate and losing his touch.

In late March, Crowley visited Boulogne to meet up with Leah, who was returning from England by steamer. While he was staying in a hotel, the police arrived to specifically question Crowley. They believed he was an Englishman named Beven for whom a warrant had been issued for fraud in Britain. There was a reward posted for him, of 25,000 francs. The mistaken identity amused Crowley, but that was all that did. The relationship with Leah, who was also addicted to heroin, coughing blood and afraid she had tuberculosis, was deteriorating. Crowley summed the situation up, 'This whole period since my return to Paris can be summarized "From Bad to Worse". Leah is a violent spiritual poison to me. We love deeply and truly; we sympathize; we do all we can to help each other: but we act on each other like Cancer.'

With no visitors lined up for Cefalù, Crowley decided he had to go to London. His luck might change and he might be able to obtain a few journalistic commissions. A drawback was his clothing. It was in tatters and certainly not smart enough for London. Crowley knew, as does every poor man, that money

does not come to one who looks down and out. Having insufficient capital to buy new clothes, he remembered he had sent his Highland dress to a company in Britain for refurbishing. He sent for it and, so attired, arrived in London with Leah in early May. They had just under ten pounds between them.

One of Crowley's first acts was to try to get possession of his books, held by the Chiswick Press. Two years earlier, the firm had been sold, the new owners demanding that Crowley settle his storage account and remove his stock. Crowley had now met the exorbitant sum of £350, paying this out of the small bequest he had received, but still the company had refused to release the books. Crowley had not had the means to sue them so he had let matters ride. Now the owners would have nothing to do with him. Disconsolate, Crowley backed off.

Being in London, Crowley took the opportunity of contacting the Kelly family, not out of any concern for Rose but to hear how his daughter was coming along. He may have hoped the family would take pity on him and give him some money, but it seems they did not. Gerald Kelly agreed to see Crowley to discuss Lola Zaza, who was now fifteen years old. It was not a congenial meeting. Kelly was, according to Crowley, 'annoyed and bewildered because Lion's Daughters do not grow wool! Lola Zaza is unmanageable. She despises everybody, thinks she is a genius, is stupid, inaccurate, plain, ill-tempered etc etc. God! But it's good to be a Lion!'

The only way Crowley could think to make money was by his pen. He contacted editors whom he had previously known, but most of them shied away. Only Austin Harrison at the *English Review* was prepared to commission him, but on the condition that Crowley wrote under a pseudonym. Accordingly, Crowley submitted an article for the centenary of Shelley's death and another which appeared in the June issue headed 'The Great Drug Delusion'. Purportedly written by an American doctor, it pooh-poohed the theory that anyone could become addicted to drugs. The next issue carried another Crowley article, supposedly by a London doctor, agreeing with his American colleague. That Crowley could write such balderdash when he

was himself knowingly addicted, and fighting hard to kick it, was reprehensible.

Inevitably, Crowley soon fell out with Harrison over money and had to find another source of income. He contacted the publisher Grant Richards, to whom he had been given an introduction by John Sullivan, to see if he would distribute the books in the Chiswick Press store or commission Crowley's memoirs. Richards refused both. Not put off, Crowley next submitted a proposal for a novel, 'a shocker on the subject which was catering to the hysteria and prurience of the sex-crazed public; the drug traffic insanity.' Again, Richards turned him down but suggested that he approach other publishers. J.D. Beresford, the fiction editor at William Collins, liked the idea and commissioned it for sixty pounds. It was a small advance but Crowley had no choice but to accept it: it was money in hand.

Without further ado, Crowley sat down to write his first truly commercial book, one for which he was not footing the bill. He summoned Leah from Paris, where she had temporarily gone, and, on 4 June, started dictating to her in the room he had rented at 31 Wellington Square, just off the King's Road in Chelsea. In twenty-seven days, the book was written. It was entitled *The Diary of a Drug Fiend* Elated, Crowley delivered the manuscript and suggested he might write his autobiography, although he puckishly referred to it as his autohagiography. The publishers read the synopsis and agreed to pay an advance of £125.

Throughout this burst of literary creativity, Crowley heavily dosed himself with heroin. So did Leah. It was the only way they could keep up the pressure. By now, Crowley's addiction was so well established the drug was not adversely affecting his mind or imagination. By 1 July, when the novel was completed, Leah was utterly exhausted. She had taken down – in longhand – 121,000 words, and departed almost immediately for Cefalù.

The novel, dutifully dedicated to Alostrael and Astarte Lulu Panthea, inevitably drew greatly upon Crowley's experiences as an addict. The main character is a rich young baronet, a Royal Flying Corps fighter ace, who falls in love with a drug-addicted nightclub hostess. They fly to Paris in his private plane and

embark upon a multi-drug binge. Stoned out of their minds, they find their lives beginning to disintegrate. It is then they hear of a mysterious figure called King Lamus. He appears off and on out of the blue in London, where he passes his time in a studio, accompanied by an Arab princess and serving a cocktail he calls 'Kubla Khan No. 2', made of gin, Calvados, crème de menthe and laudanum. The baronet visits King Lamus who, while sharing a snort of cocaine with him, judges the young man's predicament and takes him and his girlfriend away to Cefalù. There, they are given ample supplies of heroin and cocaine and attend classes in King Lamus's philosophy. Gradually, in the company of King Lamus's happy-go-lucky and enlightened followers, the benighted couple find salvation, kick their habits and live contentedly ever after.

Stylistically weak, the novel has pace, even if it meanders somewhat. Various minor characters are based upon actual people Crowley had known: Mary Butts and Cecil Maitland are transparently obvious. The plot is poorly constructed and shows that Crowley had a vivid imagination but lacked the necessary creative discipline to give it shape. Despite this, it gives a disturbingly accurate view of drug taking and addiction and, in some respects, is an early forerunner of such books as William Burroughs's *Junkie*, Jack Kerouac's *On the Road* and Irvine Welsh's *Trainspotting*.

Yet the book's main importance lies not in its literary merit or otherwise, but in the fact that it portrays the Abbey of Thelema as Crowley saw it, or would have liked it to be. From London, the shabby villa with its lack of sanitation took on a warm, romantic glow. It was not a former well-to-do peasant's abode in Sicily but a shining place in the sun where, through the application of the Law of Thelema and a form of group therapy well ahead of its time, people were saved from the miseries of their lives.

The novel appeared in November 1922. It was fairly widely and non-committally reviewed. The *Times Literary Supplement* summed it up as a 'phantasmagoria of ecstasies, despairs, and above all verbiage', the *Observer* said there was 'a certain compelling power about the descriptions of degradation', while

the *Daily Herald* remarked simply that it was 'not a pleasing book'. The literary reviewers may have been kind but the rest of the Fleet Street press was not. It was only days before the general press got hold of the fact that Crowley had risen again. James Douglas, a well known journalist who wrote a weekly column in the *Sunday Express* and saw himself as the nation's moral crusader, slammed into the book on 19 November, under the headline 'A Book for Burning'. He excoriated it, compared it to James Joyce's *Ulysses*, which was then considered obscene by moralists, misquoted from it, summed it up as 'a novel describing the orgies of vice practised by a group of moral degenerates who stimulate their degraded lusts by doses of cocaine and heroin' and ended, 'Why lock up cocaine-traffickers if we tolerate cocaine novels?'

Douglas brought the book to far greater attention than a few literary reviewers could ever have done. What was more, he advertised the existence of the abbey at Cefalù. The next weekend, the *Sunday Express* carried a banner headline on the front page: 'Complete Exposure of "Drug Fiend" Author. Black Record of Aleister Crowley. Preying on the Debased. His Abbey. Profligacy and Vice in Sicily'. What followed was a long article dragging up all the mud from the bottom of the pond of Crowley's life. It twisted the truth and was laced with half-lies. It also pointed out that Crowley had had his portrait painted by Augustus John, himself a rather colourful bohemian figure in the eyes of the press, in 1911: John supported Crowley when the newspaper lunged at him, writing, 'It is indeed high time that this damnable trade in the reputation of poets and artists were checked.' The article also released a possible meaning of A∴A∴. It stood, the paper claimed, for Atlantean Adepts. Some of the details were provided by Mary Butts, who gave the paper an interview.

As with most tabloid journalism, the *Sunday Express* sailed close to, but not through, the wind. However, there was one blatant libel in the article, stating that Crowley had once stolen £200 from a widow with whom he was cohabiting. This was a lie – and factually inaccurate: the woman this referred to was Laura Hornblow, who was not a widow and had given him only £100 – and afforded Crowley grounds to sue but, by

the time the news story broke, he was back in Sicily from where he wrote a letter to Lord Beaverbrook, the proprietor of the *Express* newspapers, asking somewhat optimistically to be treated fairly. The press, however, had its blood up. Other articles appeared, raking over his past, claiming he was running prostitutes on the streets of Palermo and had been imprisoned in America for pimping. Friends entreated him to sue but Crowley refused, saying he had no time for such paltry things. In reality, he had no money with which to pay for legal counsel.

It was not long before William Collins came under censure. The novel had sold out its initial print run of three thousand copies, thanks to the publicity, but no reprint was ordered. The publisher was well known for his religious list and was loath to jeopardise his reputation and income. What was more, he cancelled the contract for Crowley's autobiography. The only bright note was that Crowley kept the advance, which was written off by the publisher.

Gradually, the press lost interest and the story died. Life at Cefalù returned to normal. Crowley tried to stabilise his addiction, continued with his magical work, wrote and walked in the mountains. He was still very low on money but, otherwise, the future looked deceptively rosy.

In 1914, in the Café Royal, Crowley had met a woman called Betty May, whose past was even more chequered than his. Her father had been a brothel-keeper in Limehouse, catering for sailors from the London docks. As a teenager, she had set herself up as an artist's model then gone to France, where she joined a criminal gang, her part being to entice rich men into situations where they could be rolled. In the gang, she was known as Tiger Woman because of her feline looks and temper. Returning to London, she took up professional modelling again and was a favourite of Jacob Epstein, through whom she was introduced to Crowley. She was a drug user, predominantly cocaine, and a dedicated drinker. By 1922, when she was about thirty, she had been married three times, widowed once and divorced once. Her third husband, whom she married just after the First World War, was Frederick Charles Loveday.

Ten or twelve years her junior, Loveday, who preferred to be called Raoul, had first met Betty May at the Harlequin Club in Soho: his infatuation with her surprised his friends, for he was known to prefer young shop assistants and waitresses to more mature women. At the time of their marriage, he had recently come down from the University of Oxford, where he had been a scholar at St John's College, achieving a first-class degree in history. As a student, he had been known for his wild behaviour and as a member of the undergraduate Hypocrites Club, a small informal group of hedonistic thrill-seekers. On one occasion, he was said to have fallen from a college roof on to spiked railings, being impaled through the thigh, although his real fame came from his scaling the Martyrs' Memorial to place a chamberpot on the pinnacle. Loveday was fascinated by the occult and had, indeed, obtained his excellent degree pass with an essay on the part magic had played in society in the Middle Ages. He had, in the course of his studies, read and admired much of Crowley's magical writing yet had never met him. This was soon to change.

After Leah returned to Cefalù in July 1922, Crowley gave up his room in Wellington Square and lodged with a woman called Mrs Elizabeth Bickers, whose husband Crowley had known before he went to America. In her house, Mrs Bickers arranged public lectures on the Law of Thelema, inviting friends to attend in the hope that they might donate money to the abbey. It was at one of these lectures that Raoul Loveday met Crowley for the first time. Loveday took an instant liking to Crowley; Crowley was also immediately smitten. Loveday's character, he wrote in his autobiography, 'was extraordinary. He possessed every qualification for becoming a Magician of the first rank. I designated him from the first interview to be my magical Heir.' In Loveday, Crowley saw a new Neuburg, a clever and handsome young man, intellectually gifted and knowledgeable in magic, who was impressionable and weak of character.

When Loveday returned from visiting Crowley, a visit lasting three days, Betty May was dismayed. Loveday's breath smelled of ether and his character had undergone a change:

he had been astrally travelling with Crowley, doing things of which he had only heard in the past, or read about in *The Equinox*. With justification, Betty May grew concerned, her worries compounded when, one day soon after, she answered the door to find what she termed a sallow-skinned man with dark hypnotic eyes and red lips (Crowley frequently wore make-up at this period in his life) standing on the step. He was dressed in a kilt, wore a black wig and carried a verdigris covered bronze-green wand entwined with a snake.

From that moment, Betty May hated Crowley and was afraid for her husband. Crowley, who believed she had sterilised Loveday's genius by marrying him, sensed her animosity and told her the day would come when she would cook all his meals for him. He then produced a bottle of wine from his sporran and invited himself to dinner.

Betty May tried hard to undermine her husband's infatuation with and domination by Crowley, but in vain. Finally, she knew she was beaten and would have to let the relationship run its course. She hoped, when Crowley returned to Sicily, that the bond would break. She misread the situation. When Crowley departed for Cefalù, Loveday announced he wished to follow him, although he and Betty May were very short of cash and could not afford the ticket. Soon after leaving, Crowley wrote inviting Loveday to escape from the confining, restrictive atmosphere of bohemian London to Cefalù, to work as his secretary and personal assistant, and suggesting that the fare could be obtained from a friend of Crowley's called Robinson Smith, a retired theatrical agent who was himself contemplating going to Sicily. Loveday contacted him, collected the money and prepared to leave. Betty May said she was coming too: it was the only way she could see of keeping her husband.

Travelling to Cefalù, they met Nina Hamnett, whom they knew, in Paris. She tried her best to dissuade them from going, but Loveday's mind was set. By the time they reached Palermo, they were penniless and had to sell Betty May's wedding ring to raise enough money to catch the train to Cefalù. Once there, they walked up the mountainside to the Abbey of Thelema, arriving after

dark on 26 November 1922. To their knock, Crowley opened the door, dressed in his magical robes. Loveday was immediately allowed in but Betty May had to wait outside until she agreed to reply 'Love is the Law. Love under Will' to Crowley's greeting of 'Do what thou wilt shall be the whole of the Law.'

Crowley initiated Loveday into the A∴A∴ and named him Aud, which meant magical light. This done, he instructed Loveday in those aspects of magic of which he was ignorant, hugely pleased by how his new disciple 'acquired the faculty of visions in astonishing perfection from the very first.' Clearly, Crowley had great hopes for Loveday.

While Betty May thought the Abbey of Thelema was shabby, Crowley rude and the food inedible, Loveday was enraptured. He spent his first week revelling in the freedom of the place, feeling exhilarated by the sun on his shoulders. When he was not studying magic or taking part in rituals, he climbed the Rocca di Cefalù, played chess, strummed a mandolin and lazed.

As for Betty May, who was definitely not there for the magic, she was ordered to be the housekeeper, taking over the duties from Ninette, who was, yet again, pregnant. Her tasks included cleaning the villa, looking after the children, shopping in Cefalù and carrying the provisions up to the abbey – and, as if to prove Crowley right on the day they first met, cooking. From the very start, she was antagonistic towards Crowley and went out of her way to annoy him. She disobeyed his orders at every turn and refused to repent. It was a rule in the community that no one could use the first person pronoun save Crowley: everyone else had to use the impersonal 'one.' Every infringement demanded self mutilation with a razor blade much as Crowley had done to himself at Posillipo with Mary d'Este Sturges. Loveday's forearms were striped with scabs, Betty May's were pristine. Crowley never used a knife and fork. He ate with his hands, washing them before and after a meal in a ritual bowl. Betty May was obliged to hold the bowl for him: on one occasion, she emptied it over his head. Crowley sought revenge but Betty

May was resolute, determined and tough, and he only once achieved it. One afternoon, Crowley announced the intended sacrifice of Sister Sibyline (Betty May's community name) at eight that evening. Fearful for her life, Betty May slipped away and hid on the Rocca di Cefalù, not returning until the early hours of the next morning. Crowley had fooled her.

He may have disliked Betty May's independent intransigence, but Crowley also respected it. He took her rock climbing and found her a pleasant companion, yet she never fell under his spell. It was Crowley's contention that the abbey life released her from the tensions in her own life. She became, he wrote in his autobiography, 'a gay and careless child finding pleasure in every detail of everyday life. She went about singing. On increasingly rare occasions she would suddenly relapse into her old self and feel wretched for a few hours.' He also thought she was unhinged, however, and believed she sporadically sneaked away to rendezvous with young men in Cefalù.

Raoul Loveday was the antithesis of his wife. He was completely in Crowley's thrall and did as he was bade without question. In addition, where Betty May was physically fit, Loveday was not. The regime of drug-taking and long hours engaged in often tiring rituals sapped his energy and made him prone to minor infections. The self-imposed cuts on his arms went septic and healed slowly. If anyone was going to suffer ill health at the abbey, it was going to be him.

The villa had a resident population of stray cats which were regarded as the embodiment of evil spirits. Betty May, who dismissed this notion, furtively fed two of the cats, named Mischette and Mischu. One day in mid February 1923, as the community was seated at a meal, Crowley announced the presence of an evil spirit, reached under the table and pulled out Mischette. The cat started spitting and lashed out, lacerating Crowley's arm with its claws. At this, Crowley declared the cat was to be sacrificed and gave the job to Loveday. The cat was put in a sack to await its fate.

The ceremony, as Betty May remembered it in her autobiography, *Tiger Woman*, was bizarre. The cat was brought to the

altar, anaesthetised with ether and held up as Loveday spoke a lengthy incantation. It was then lowered and he was made to slit its throat with a sacrificial knife. By accident, the incision was not much more than a deep flesh wound. The cat, now conscious, broke from his grasp and ran around the room spraying blood in all directions. Once it was caught, the whole process was repeated by a now pale and shocked Loveday. On the second, successful attempt, the cat's blood was collected in a silver cup by Crowley, who then ordered Loveday to drink it. He obeyed.

Very soon after the ceremony, Loveday fell seriously ill, suffering stomach cramps and a high fever. Betty May grew very concerned. She wondered if he had contracted something from the cat, yet the truth seems to have been far more mundane.

Betty May and Loveday had gone for a long afternoon walk. On the way back, Loveday had drunk from a mountain spring, although Crowley forcefully impressed upon all visitors that they should never drink from springs or streams but only the boiled water at the villa. There were small settlements higher up the mountains which polluted some of the watercourses. Betty May had heeded this advice but Loveday was just too thirsty.

Crowley identified Mediterranean fever and a local physician, Dr Maggio, was summoned. He diagnosed a liver infection, possibly hepatitis. This could have been the case, for hepatitis is associated with drug abuse and can be transmitted sexually: the chances that Crowley was infected, and was an asymptomatic carrier, were high. Loveday did not improve and the diagnosis was changed to acute gastroenteritis, probably contracted from drinking contaminated water but also possibly caught from the cat's blood, from bacteria in its throat or he could have been allergic to felines. Whatever the cause, on 14 February Loveday died.

The body was put in an open coffin and left in an outhouse, local custom demanding that no corpse remain in a house after sunset on the day of death. Crowley spent the night murmuring incantations over it. The following day, a funeral was conducted on unconsecrated ground on the hillside just outside the local cemetery. The ceremony was an occult one conducted according to established A∴A∴ ritual, although this must have been the

first time it was carried out, certainly by Crowley. He wore a hooded cloak of white silk embroidered with gold occult symbols. *The Book of the Law* was read aloud with some lines from Crowley's 'The Ship'. According to Betty May, a large crowd of peasants witnessed the event. Jane Wolfe, however, claimed that the only spectators were three rather sceptical monks. Later that year, Loveday's family had the coffin exhumed and his remains were returned to England.

The funeral over, Crowley took to his bed. His temperature soared and he was ill for some weeks. It was not until 13 April that he felt sufficiently well to leave for Naples to recuperate. Four days after her husband's death, Betty May received some money through the British consul in Palermo. She immediately left Cefalù. Jane Wolfe followed after her, going to London on a mission to find new recruits.

When Betty May reached Britain, she broke the news of Loveday's death to the *Sunday Express*. Her story made the headlines on 25 February: 'New Sinister Revelations of Aleister Crowley. Varsity Lad's Death. Enticed To "Abbey". Dreadful Ordeal of a Young Wife. Crowley's Plans'. The story that followed further increased Crowley's already considerable notoriety:

> *The revelations in the 'Sunday Express' recently of obscene orgies carried on by Aleister Crowley — 'The Beast 666', as he styles himself — in his 'abbey' at Cefalù, Sicily, have been followed by a sinister and tragic happening.*
>
> *Information has just reached this newspaper of his two latest victims. One of them, a brilliant young English university man, a writer, is dead.*
>
> *His young wife, a beautiful girl prominent in London artistic circles, arrived in London two days ago in a state of collapse. She is unable to give more than a hint of the horrors from which she has escaped.*

Worse Horrors Still

> *She said, however, to a 'Sunday Express' representative yesterday that the story of Aleister Crowley's sexual debauches and drug orgies as published in this newspaper*

far understates the real horror of the life in the 'abbey' at Cefalù, where he keeps his women and practises his black magic.

This young girl, whose name and that of her husband the 'Sunday Express' withholds in deference to the parents' sorrow, said that Crowley offered her husband a secretarial post last autumn when in London. The Beast is possessed of a persuasive smile and suave manners. The young couple had no idea of the true character of the place to which he was inviting them. As the offer seemed to mean travel and congenial work the young husband – a boy of twenty-two – accepted it.

Once they were in Sicily, however, they found they had been trapped in an inferno, a maelstrom of filth and obscenity. Crowley's purpose was to corrupt them both to his own ends.

They resisted him and his women with all the strength they could summon. The wife was forced to do the cooking and kitchen work for the nine people in the house.

Turned Out

Then suddenly the boy husband fell ill of enteritis, due to the insanitary conditions there, and was too weak to be removed. The girl-wife was left alone to fight the Beast 666. Since she defied him in every way and managed to keep herself clear of the bestialities of the house, he turned her out one night. All that night she was unable to return into the 'abbey' on the hills above Cefalù to tend her dying husband. Two days later the boy was dead.

The girl who had made so courageous a fight against the Beast who sought to destroy her was given money by the British Consul to return to England. Crowley was obliged to let her go. But he made dire threats of vengeance if she told what she knew.

She has not told anything more than has already been published in this newspaper, but she is still in danger from the Beast. The 'Sunday Express' is putting the facts of this tragic case in the hands of Scotland Yard.

Child Spectators

It is among the clean minded and inexperienced that

he seeks his victims. This latest tragedy has brought to light the fact that the Beast 666 has laid all plans for establishing a colony of Oxford youths at Cefalù. There it is supposed he will initiate them into the obscene rites of his own unspeakable brand of black magic.

It is hoped that these latest plans may be frustrated. But Crowley, in sending out his invitations to young Oxford men to come to Cefalù, knows how to word them enticingly, and leaves out any hint of the unspeakable facts of his 'religion' until such time as he has his victims fairly in his clutches.

The facts are too unutterably filthy to be detailed in a newspaper, for they have to do with sexual orgies that touch the lowest depth of depravity. The whole is mixed up in a hocus pocus of doubtful mysticism, of which Crowley is 'the Purple Priest.'

Children under ten, whom the Beast keeps at the 'abbey,' are made to witness horrible sexual debauches unbelievably revolting. Filthy incense is burned and cakes made of goats' blood and honey are consumed in the windowless room where the Beast conducts his rites. The rest of the time he lies in a room hung with obscene pictures collected all over the world, saturating himself with drugs.

The Beast's Hope

An interesting piece of information has just reached the 'Sunday Express'. Crowley has outgrown the 'abbey' at Cefalù. He desires to extend his activities, but lacks the money to do so. He put the problem before some of the spirits that attend his magic rites.

'Sue the "Sunday Express" for £5,000 and build a new "abbey" with the money,' came the command.

The Beast foresaw difficulties. He could not risk bringing suit himself, for all the statements made in the newspaper were correct. If they had not been he would have brought suit long ago. Yet the 'spirit' was insistent.

'£5,000 for a new abbey.'

So the Beast is sending one of his women to London to see what she can do. The 'Sunday Express' promises

> *Crowley that it intends to pursue its investigations with the utmost ruthlessness, and that next Sunday it will endeavour to supply him with considerable further material on which to base any action which he may care to bring.*

The next weekend more searing headlines appeared: 'Young Wife's Story of Crowley's Abbey. Scenes of Horror. Drugs, Magic, and Vile Practices. Girl's Ordeal. Saved by the Consul.' Betty May and Loveday were not named, which was just as well: if the truth of this 'innocent young wife's' lurid past had leaked out, the attack on Crowley would have been considerably undermined.

The *Sunday Express* was soon joined by *John Bull*. Bottomley was by now in jail and the editors were desperate to acquire circulation-pushing copy, for the journal was going bankrupt. For over a year, they spun the Crowley story out under such headings as 'The King of Depravity', 'A Man We'd Like to Hang', 'A Human Beast Returns' and 'The Wickedest Man in the World': the latter epithet has remained with Crowley ever since, long past his death. The articles made insinuations, cast aspersions and hinted at foul play in Loveday's death although, once again, he was not mentioned by name, and the fact that he had died of natural causes had already been ascertained and published by the *Sunday Express*. Yet once the suggestion was made, the public took it on board. To this day, there remains a 'mystery' about Loveday's death.

Among other things, the press reported on the children at the abbey being starved, the ritual of a naked woman being violated on an altar (the sacrifice of the goat was mentioned but not its other intended role in the drama) and the free use of drugs to aid in the debauchery of Crowley's victims. *John Bull* even went so far as to accuse Crowley of cannibalism, of eating two porters on one of his Himalayan expeditions when food stocks ran critically low. Any lie, falsehood or unsubstantiated fact was dragged up to bring Crowley down.

The press in the USA took the story up. There, too,

Crowley was attacked under headlines like 'The Angel Child Who 'Saw Hell' and Came Back'. The 'Angel Child' in question was Betty May, professional gang seducer and thrice-married artists' model. Once again, public perception was manipulated against Crowley, although it must be said that he had gone some of the way towards assisting the press with what he had written in *The Diary of a Drug Fiend*, which many people already assumed was at the least substantially autobiographical.

Much of the press coverage was extremely libellous and gave Crowley ample grounds upon which to sue, and with good expectation of winning, even before a jury, but it was widely known that he was living from hand to mouth and could not afford legal counsel. Emboldened by this knowledge, the press rightly considered itself all but immune from prosecution. Furthermore, the editors knew that if Crowley did sue, the circulation the trial afforded would more than pay for any legal settlement, so they hammered on at him regardless.

By now, Crowley was the national scapegoat, Public Enemy Number One, the man everyone loved to hate. He was bemused by this, not quite able to understand how such a situation had come about. He was a religious leader, an author of merit and a major thinker of the age, and yet here he was being pilloried and lambasted from all sides. The fame he had craved all his adult life had come about, but it had all gone terribly wrong. Henceforth, he knew, it would be virtually impossible to be taken seriously. His mission, to spread the word of *The Book of the Law*, was in jeopardy, probably beyond rescue

Worse was yet to come. European newspapers took the story from the wire services and reproduced it. When it was published in Italy, it drew the attention of Mussolini, who had not long been in power and was consolidating his political position. Mussolini was terrified of secret societies: they had been the bane of Italian life for centuries. In particular, he was concerned with freemasonic societies, which often espoused politically dissident, anti-Fascist ambitions, and occult groups, which could greatly influence the superstitious Italian people It was no wonder that the appearance of a

foreign-led occult community in Sicily greatly disturbed Il Duce.

Leaders of Italian secret societies were readily arrested. Freemasonic grand masters, leaders of cults or non-Christian organisations and Sicilian *mafiosi* were exiled or held under house arrest on Lipari Island, off the north-east coast of Sicily. Where Crowley was concerned, there was only one option open to Mussolini's Fascist authorities. It was deportation.

On 23 April 1923, Crowley was summoned to the office of the local *commissario* of police and presented with a deportation order. He and his followers were to leave Italian soil forthwith. Crowley asked if the order really applied to everyone at the abbey, or just to him. He was told everyone. When Crowley read the deportation order, however, he saw only his name upon it and drew this to the *commissario*'s attention. Reluctantly, the official concurred that only Crowley was to go. He was given a week.

Seven days later, on 30 April, Crowley left Cefalù for Palermo. The next day, he caught a ship bound for Tunis, arriving there on 2 May. He did not travel alone. Leah, concerned for his health, went with him. Back in London, the press rejoiced. *John Bull* relished Crowley's deportation and commented that he was not welcome in Britain, either.

Many years later, Crowley stated that he believed the deportation had been brought about by the agitation of local Catholic priests, despite a large number of local people signing a petition against his expulsion, the signatures collected by Ninette. It is unlikely that the priests had played a part in his deportation. The abbey posed no threat to them, Crowley did not seduce or inculcate any local Sicilian girls, and he never criticised or came up against the local Church authorities. Mussolini had sufficient cause to act without any clerical coercion. As for the local people, they did not especially wish to see Crowley go: he had been a source of local gossip and amusement, although they were very cagey about going near the villa, and it was said that those who passed it by often genuflected at the sound of incantations. Rumours of the goings-on in the abbey were rife from Cefalù all the way to Palermo. Clifford Bax was told by

an artist friend who had visited Sicily that, while he was waiting on the platform at Palermo railway station, the artist had asked an acquaintance if it was true that Crowley conducted rites with four naked girls lying on the four points of a compass drawn on the floor. The acquaintance called a station porter, who vociferously verified the fact.

For a while after Crowley's departure, some of his followers stayed on but, eventually, the building was reclaimed by the landlord, who had the place cleaned up, the floor of the temple room covered with a concrete screed and the murals whitewashed. The legend of the place continued to be told among the locals, exaggerated and twisted with each new telling. In 1955, the avant-garde film director Kenneth Anger visited Cefalù in the company of the famous American sexologist, Professor Alfred Kinsey. Anger removed much of the whitewash to expose many of the paintings underneath and lifted the concrete screed on the floor to find the magic circle in the centre of which the altar had stood. Anger was keen to refound the Abbey of Thelema, but the OTO and other Crowley followers showed less than enthusiasm for the project.

Today, the villa at the centre of Crowley's ambitions lies abandoned. Cefalù has grown and it no longer stands alone on the mountainside but is surrounded by other buildings and a sports stadium. It is bricked up. For a long while, it has been suggested that the house might be turned into a museum dedicated to Crowley, but nothing has yet materialised.

Despite his ignominious departure from Cefalù, Crowley considered in retrospect that the Abbey of Thelema had been a qualified success. He had shown there that one could be freed from sexual obsession and the baggage of jealousy, selfishness and deceit with which it came, yet he must have conveniently forgotten Leah and Ninette's envy of each other in his summation. The sharing of financial responsibility had, he thought, worked, although it must be said that there was little actual money to share. Materialism had been cast aside. The children,

he believed, had received a good, if informal, education which had allowed them to discover themselves. Everyone had come in touch with his or her True Will. However, he did admit that it would not be possible for most people to accept the Law of Thelema, for the majority would not be able to contain or control themselves in an atmosphere of total spiritual liberty. Most people, he concluded, did not have a true will, so the responsibility for ruling and guiding the world would have to rest with him and his followers. Crowley did not see, in this respect, that *The Book of the Law* was wrong in that it did not carry a message for all mankind after all, but only instructions to a few who were in touch with their inner selves. The pan-global message the Secret Chiefs had given Crowley to disseminate was, even by his own admission, an impractical proposition which, like communism, could never work because basic human nature instinctively rebelled against or sought to undermine it.

The ultimate irony was that Crowley's idealistic and impractical dream was exactly that which had brought him down. He was now forty-seven years old and, because of his dedication to the precepts contained in *The Book of the Law*, his ambitions were shattered, his reputation, such as it had ever been, was in tatters, and he was a social pariah.

16

The Dethroning of Leah

On arriving in Tunis, Crowley and Leah booked into the Hotel Eymon but, disturbed by noisy guests in a neighbouring room, moved on to the cheaper Au Souffle du Zéphir in La Marsa, today a northern suburb of the city. Crowley hoped at first that their stay would be temporary, that the deportation order would be nullified and that he and Leah could return, but, as the days passed, he realised this was not going to happen. Faced with this reality, he wondered if he might not re-form the abbey on the island of Zembra, in the Gulf of Tunis, where only true followers of Thelema would stay under much stricter monastic conditions. There had, he thought, been too much of an easy-going atmosphere at Cefalù. Those who were invited to join would have to possess dedication and magical ability as well as physical beauty, a degree of fiscal acumen and, of course, financial potential.

Financial considerations were foremost in Crowley's mind. Not only was he paying a hotel bill in Tunis but he was still supporting a community in Sicily which was now one mouth greater. On 19 May, Ninette gave birth to a daughter, Isabella. Crowley was not her father: Baron la Calce was. Crowley did not like him. Two weeks later, he wrote in his diary, 'I feel the need of a new word – dislike too familiar, contempt too tolerant – and I want this word for Carlo la Calce!!!!!' Later that day, Crowley added that he thought he must be subconsciously jealous of the Baron, for there was no doubt about the infant's father. At the time she was conceived, Crowley was in London.

As for the baby itself, Crowley cast its horoscope and concluded, 'There is no big complex to make the child distinguished. She is likely to develop into a fairly ordinary little whore.'

Isabella may not have been Crowley's but, over the years, he must have sired an unknown number of bastards. The exact number may never be known. He rarely paid towards their upbringing and even more rarely had any contact with them or their mothers. He was as profligate with his sperm as the most libidinous rock star. He never practised any form of contraception and, when a mistress or lover announced her pregnancy, he refused to let her have an abortion. In his opinion, abortion was tantamount to murder and he derided a society that condoned it, albeit having illegalised it. Women, he believed, should be free to decide the fate of their foetus, and he was certain that no woman, once she was outside the narrow confines of social convention, would ever want a pregnancy terminated. For all his misogyny, Crowley was in many ways a pro-feminist who considered women badly served and grossly misrepresented by the law.

Crowley spent his time reading *The Book of the Law* in the hope that it might provide an answer to his current impecunious state. Eventually, he whittled down the possibilities for his future to two alternatives. One was to step back and let Leah concentrate on her magical abilities; the other was to await the arrival of a rich man from the West, as *The Book of the Law* promised.

What also preyed on Crowley's mind was his health and he decided to visit a doctor, Thomas Domela, whom he had first met in 1920 when waiting in Tunis for Jane Wolfe. His problem then had been a verruca: now it was the return of the foot ailment, 'the curious colony of blisters which I acquired at Montauk & have continued at odd times ever since have now started to grow very fast.' Domela had at first treated them, with some success, with zinc ointment, but now he painted them with tincture of iodine. This suppressed those treated, but no sooner had they disappeared than others erupted. Crowley's immune system was being heavily undermined by his drug taking.

His generally debilitated condition depressed Crowley and he started to have a crisis of confidence. In his diary entry for 28 May, he wrote, 'I have doubted as to whether I am such a great Magician after all.' A week later, he recorded that he was 'fearfully depressed about nothing', but added within hours, 'Pulling myself together, but still very tired & vaguely depressed.' Five days later, and still mentally disturbed, he declared, 'I may be a Black Magician, but I'm a bloody great one.' Under normal circumstances, Crowley would never have made such a damning claim. He devised several bizarre plans at this time, including to walk to Cairo with J.F.C. Fuller to abstract (a Crowley euphemism for burgle) the stele of Ankh f n Khonsu from the museum. Ever a correspondent, he also wrote to King George V proposing a religious crusade and, conversely, to Trotsky to suggest that he head up an international anti Christianity movement.

Beyond his anxieties about money and his health, Crowley was deeply worried about his drug-taking. He knew it was affecting him widely and, for a while, he systematically reduced his heroin dose, bit by bit, keeping himself going with ether. Yet he could not maintain the regime. His will, so important to him, gave way, and he returned to heavier fixes. This, as much as the physical ailments heroin caused, must have been of the greatest dismay to him. Crowley's entire philosophy was based upon the exercise of True Will: his was being eroded, stolen from him, leaving him in a parlous state. This was not supposed to happen to gods, yet it was happening to him and it cast doubts on his omnipotence.

Now, in Tunis, he knew he had to take desperate measures. On 7 June, he visited Dr Domela's surgery. It was decided that Crowley would try to kick the habit, to 'make good by cutting off heroin "cold turkey."' (It is interesting to note that the term for withdrawal was extant as long ago as the mid-1920s.) Immediately, Crowley went through the whole gamut of withdrawal symptoms - vomiting, severe diarrhoea, cramps, muscle spasms, delirium - but now his will held. In three days, he 'woke fresh, strong and well.' It did not last. Within two days, he had taken heroin, making in his diary all

the typical excuses addicts make for caving in. On 3 September, he wrote that he had made an oath: as soon as he had £3,000 in hand, he would take a sanatorium cure. This, in itself, was an admission of failure: the chances of Crowley having such a sum were remote.

Heroin was not Crowley's only concern. Whereas the opiate had him physiologically, cocaine held him firmly in a psychological grip.

> *Why is it* [he wrote on 17 September] *that one takes Cocaine (but no other drug) gluttonously, dose upon dose, neither feeling the need for it, nor hoping to get any good from it? I have found that every time 3 doses, intelligently taken, secure all one wants Yet, if the stuff is at hand, it is almost impossible not to go on One resists successfully (perhaps) for a few nights, then slides into a 'go as you please' race without rime or reason. One even goes on while actually cursing oneself for one's folly . Why take thirty doses (or is it sixty? I haven't a ghost of a guess) to get into a state neither pleasant nor in any other way desirable, but fraught with uneasiness, remorse, self-contempt, alarm discomfort & irritation at the ever-present thought of 'Hell! now I have to endure the reaction' while well aware that with 3 one can get all one wants without one single drawback?*

Insomnia and impotence were now proving to be fresh drug-induced problems. Crowley spent much of the day in bed, dozing off and on, vaguely meditating and rising in the late afternoon. His appetite was low. During the night, he slept fitfully, sniffing ether to steady his nerves. For a few hours around dawn he might sleep, but he was awake again by mid-morning. As for sex, he appears to have lost the urge. His diaries do not record any sexual magic with Leah and he refers to his 'certain recent troubles' in the context of sex with her. He tried to come to terms with this failing and commented upon his own sexuality: 'My homosexual instinct is due to the idea

of aesthetic admiration. If a man fucks a woman he admires her aesthetically ... When a man fucks me I want to know it is for my beauty.' In the back of his mind, he was making excuses for his loss of sexual drive: his temporary celibacy was because there were no aesthetic opportunities arising.

In this period of indifference and personal slough, Crowley was embarked upon one very positive aim. Every day, he continued with the dictation of his autohagiography. He had started it the previous autumn at Cefalù, Leah and Jane Wolfe taking it in turns to receive the dictation and type it up. Now, the task was Leah's alone. Even though William Collins had decided against publication, Crowley was determined to get his life thus far down on paper. In this way he could, he thought, justify himself, explain what he was all about and, to some extent, address the wrongs perpetrated against him by Beaverbrook, Bottomley and the rest of the society to which he paid short shrift: 'I don't give a damn for the whole human race – "you're nothing but a pack of cards."' Nothing in the book was to be fictionalised: it was to be the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth so far as Crowley saw it. This proviso allowed for vain exaggeration, yet this does not detract from the work so long as the reader is aware of Crowley's substantial egotism. His main regret was his belief that he had done so little with his life and had so much yet to accomplish. When it was finished the autohagiography, entitled *The Confessions of Aleister Crowley*, was over 500,000 words long and was to be the most sustained and literary of all Crowley's books: his literary abilities, which had been deteriorating, were revived. In time, it was to bolster considerably his international reputation both as a writer and a man of the occult. But, in 1923, that was far into the future.

The day before Crowley was deported from Sicily, Norman Mudd had arrived at the Abbey of Thelema. Crowley left him in charge.

After going down from Cambridge, Mudd had been unable to get Crowley out of his mind. He had gone to South Africa and gained employment in 1911 as head of

the Department of Applied Mathematics at Grey University College in Bloemfontein. It was hardly a sought after teaching post and did nothing to further his academic career. In 1915, he went blind in one eye as a result of contracting gonorrhoea, which only compounded his dislike of South Africa and disappointment with his job. For some years, he tried to contact Crowley, writing to him at addresses at which he knew he had lived but receiving no answer or having his letters returned to sender.

In 1920, Mudd had a sabbatical year off from his work. He returned to Britain to find Crowley but was told he was in America: consequently, Mudd set off across the Atlantic. He did not know that Crowley was by now back in Europe. What then appears to have happened is that Mudd met Charles Stansfeld Jones, who initiated him into the OTO, giving him the name Frater Omnia Pro Veritate 'OPV', and telling him that Crowley was in Sicily. Mudd wrote to Crowley until 1923, when he decided that his course lay not with teaching mathematics but the Law of Thelema. He resigned his job and offered himself to Crowley. Immediately, Crowley called him to Cefalu. Mudd was keen and brought his life savings with him, which he handed over to his new master.

From Tunis, Crowley called for Mudd to join him. Mudd was pleased to be summoned. The abbey was empty without Crowley and all the other acolytes had gone: only Ninette and the children, including Hansi, remained. He arrived on 20 June, Leah returning to Sicily the next day. A few weeks later, they were joined by Edmund Saayman, a South African student of Mudd's, now a Rhodes Scholar up at New College, Oxford, who came to spend his university summer vacation. He was writing a paper on the mathematical aspects of *The Book of the Law*, work upon which Sullivan had once embarked but given up. It appears not to have impressed his tutors for he gained only a third-class degree. Crowley, however, was pleased at this young man's interest, but also hopeful that he might bring some money with him. However, Saayman was far from wealthy and, contrary to expectations, not only brought little with him but

also ran out of funds before his vacation was over, writing for a loan to the British consul in Tunis, his father not having answered a plea for funds.

Armed with Mudd's savings, Crowley announced he was going on a magical retirement and, leaving Mudd to cope with everyday events and his correspondence, he moved on 25 July into a room at the Tunisia Palace Hotel, the most expensive in the city. He was accompanied by Mohammed ben Brahim, a teenage boy Crowley had picked up in a wander round the *suq*, whom he was training to be his valet and magical servant: in other words, he was in effect Crowley's rent boy. His retirement does not appear to have been too magical: he took in a Charlie Chaplin movie, planned a golf course in detail, with coloured sketch maps of all the holes, and played chess. In the luxury of the hotel, he ate better and started to sleep more regular hours. His sex drive began to revive. After a while, he decided to give up the magical retirement, but he remained in the hotel until October, when he was presented with the problem of settling a hefty bill. Paying this invoice was not Crowley's only problem: the Tunisian police hounded him, probably at the insistence of the Italian authorities, and it took the intervention of the British consul general, Philip Sarell, to smooth things over.

Leah returned to Tunis from Cefalù in late August to stay with Mudd and Saayman, frequently visiting Crowley to take dictation and, possibly, to have sex with him. There was, however, a complication arising. In the cheap hotel in La Marsa, Mudd and Leah were sharing the same room out of financial necessity and forming an attachment. Crowley found out and objected strongly, not because he was jealous but because the relationship could upset the Great Work. On 28 September, he made Mudd take an oath which stated that, because he was in love with Leah, his powers of reasoning were poor and, therefore, he was unable to concentrate upon what the Secret Chiefs required of him. Once under oath, Mudd moved to a nearby village to undergo a magical retirement, taking the manuscript of Crowley's autobiography to read and study.

Where Mudd was concerned, Crowley had another task in mind beyond furthering the Secret Chiefs' cause. He wanted Mudd to try to repair his reputation. Mudd, now appointed Crowley's public relations consultant, started writing letters to the press either of his own composition or of Crowley's, which he copied and signed. Some letters, to individuals ranging from the headmaster of Malvern College to such eminent literary figures as Thomas Hardy and Joseph Conrad, stressed how Crowley had been wronged and asked for support, primarily of a financial nature. It was sad: Crowley was reduced to writing little more than begging letters.

When it came time to leave the Tunisia Palace Hotel, Crowley announced that he was undertaking yet another magical retirement. With Mudd, Leah and Mohammed ben Brahim, he set off by car for the town of Nefta, a centre of pilgrimage on the edge of the vast Chott El Djérid salt flats. Once there, they hired a camel and set off into the desert, resting during the heat of day and travelling at night. Crowley smoked hashish and had sexual magic with the boy. The intention was to be away for a month but, after three days, Leah fell ill and they returned to Nefta, putting up at the Hotel de Djérid. Then Crowley fell ill and was unable to conduct any more sexual magic. Leah, feeling a little better, took over until Mohammed ben Brahim went sick. Somewhat disheartened, the party returned to Tunis.

Crowley was growing increasingly concerned about Leah's health. She was pallid, even thinner and, although she was no longer coughing blood, Crowley was afraid that she had tuberculosis. He wrote to Alma Hirsig not long before they departed for Nefta, asking her to send money immediately and come to live with Leah, as well as arranging for Hansi to leave Cefalù and be educated. When Alma finally arranged to go to Sicily a few months later, however, Crowley went back on this and instructed Ninette that she should have no access to either the villa or Hansi.

The year of 1923, filled with hardship and sickness, disruption and adversity, ended on a disappointing note.

On 29 December, Crowley decided that his magical energy was exhausted and he had to move on. He took what money was left and booked passage for Nice, leaving Mudd and Leah destitute. Yet he had a plan which he was certain was going to reverse their misfortunes.

Once in Nice, he met up with Frank Harris. He, too, was virtually penniless, but he was scheming. The idea Harris had was for the two of them to raise sufficient capital to buy and co-edit a Parisian newspaper, the *Evening Telegram*. Borrowing five hundred francs on his behalf, Harris sent Crowley to Paris, where he arrived on 5 January, once again taking a room at the Hotel de Blois, despite the fact that he still owed the proprietors two thousand francs from previous visits. It was just as well the owners, Monsieur and Madame Bourcier, had taken a liking to Crowley and were not averse to postponing payment.

Quite what Crowley was supposed to do in the furtherance of the newspaper purchasing plan is not known but, whatever it was, he does not seem to have done it. His magical powers on the wane, he spent much of his time in bed.

> *I seem* [he wrote in his diary on 13 January 1924] *to have no strength or energy left I take no real interest in anything for more than a few minutes at a time I have no real hope, that is the root of the matter I have but a few minutes a day when I feel fit I resent dressing and undressing I sleep late after going to bed early; I sleep long yet wake weary It is a dreadful effort to rise, even by 1 p m & my real reason is that it is too much trouble to have food sent up .. I long for death – simply to be away from the body which weighs me down instead of being my chariot.*

He called to Aiwass for assistance, but in vain.

Between Crowley and Harris there existed a rather essential misunderstanding. Both erroneously believed that the other had sufficient pull to raise the financing for the newspaper purchase. Notwithstanding, Harris succeeded in finding the necessary

capital and, in March, his buy-out was complete. However, Harris did not remain owner for long as he was unable to service his loan and was obliged to surrender control.

The failure of Crowley's magical life, as well as his everyday existence, has been determined by some in occult circles as a punishment for his having grown over-ambitious and taking upon himself the grade of Ipsissimus when this was not earned. It has been their contention that the Secret Chiefs had had enough of Crowley and were casting him aside, for he had let them down. Crowley would not have agreed, although he was sure that something was astrally wrong and it was driving him towards a nervous breakdown.

The problems Crowley had to contend with were, however, as nothing compared to those Mudd and Leah faced in Tunis. They were utterly poverty-stricken and had pawned everything, including Crowley's magic ring, which fetched eighty-four francs. They were starving and furious that letters to Crowley asking for help went unheeded. With the eighty-four francs, Leah was able to get back to Cefalu, but Mudd was stuck. The few efforts Crowley had made to earn some money in Paris, contacting journalist acquaintances to see if they would commission articles from him, came to nothing. At last, on 14 January, Crowley had some luck in the form of the artist Leon Engers Kennedy, who rashly lent him five hundred francs. With this, Crowley went on a spending spree, buying himself new clothes; yet he also sent money to Mudd by way of the travel agents, Thomas Cook. Mudd did a moonlight flit from Tunis, leaving a trail of debts and reaching Paris nine days later.

In mid-January, Crowley again visited a doctor, complaining of continual vomiting and diarrhoea. The doctor, a man called Ducasse, misdiagnosed dysentery. For a second opinion, Crowley visited a Dr Jarvis at the British Hospital in Paris, who correctly assessed Crowley's problem as drug related. Then, in February, Crowley underwent two operations on his nose. His nasal passages were in bad condition as a result of his years of snorting and sniffing dope. Part of his treatment was to have a mixture of heroin, bismuth and lactose pushed up his nose

as a sort of cauterising plug. The heroin had little effect on the rest of his body but it did stop the irritation in his sinuses. For his difficulty with breathing and almost continuous coughing, a doctor offered him a heroin injection, but Crowley refused it. He had never injected heroin – he took it by snorting, like cocaine – and was afraid what this might do to his existing addiction. He was, in any case, temporarily trying to reduce his intake. His diary noted how desperate he really was to kick the habit, going through the trial of withdrawal yet again but without success.

News coming from Cefalù was bad. Ninette, Leah and the children were to be evicted because of non-payment of the rent. The Baron intended to sell or relet the property. This posed two immediate problems: Crowley had to find some cash urgently, and he wanted to be sure that his library, including his diaries and many rare books, was removed before he lost tenure of the villa. Mudd immediately arranged for the books to be sent to Britain by American Express: it was an ill-considered move carried out with undue haste. The whole consignment was seized on arrival as obscene material by the British Customs and impounded. Mudd, as the importer, declared to the police that he was ignorant of the contents and waived any right he had to plead for their return; had he had the perspicacity to argue the matter, he would certainly have saved some of Crowley's books and papers. Later, Crowley was informed in writing that all his possessions 'were condemned in the High Court on the 24th March, 1926, and have been disposed of in accordance with the law.' They were destroyed along with, it seems most likely, many of Crowley's notes on his experimentation with various drugs. It was an act of indifferent Establishment barbarity for, while some of the material could easily have been considered pornographic, most of it was not.

Immediate funds were raised by Crowley pawning his magical equipment (some of which contained semi-precious stones) and anything else of value, including his two revolvers, which had travelled widely with him over the years. Using this money, Crowley dispatched Mudd to London on a fund-raising

and public relations mission, grandly appointing him with a letter of introduction to be his 'Agent Plenipotentiary'. Crowley remained ill in the Hotel de Blois, racked with asthma, taking heroin and inhaling ether to combat it, coughing all night and searching for any other medicine that could give him relief. In his diary, he wrote a brief history of his addiction, reluctantly accepting that he was irrevocably hooked. Heroin was now quite essential to the maintenance of his life. Like addicts before him – Thomas De Quincey and Samuel Taylor Coleridge – he wanted to warn others of his plight, that they should assiduously avoid it, 'that my experience should serve as a preliminary prima facie case for a revolutionary revision of the extant medical theories on the subject, and of the legislation regarding the sale of heroin and similar drugs.'

When Leah arrived from Cefalù at the end of March, she was understandably furious. She accused Crowley of letting her down, criticised his magical work and generally berated him. Mudd joined in with a 'more concentrated sample of Vitriol it has never been my fortune to analyze.' Nevertheless, Leah started taking dictation again, and a few friends lent them a small sum of money upon which to keep going. On 1 May, fortune once again dealt Crowley a cruel hand. The Bourciers sold the hotel and the new owner evicted Crowley, who put a curse on it. It subsequently went bankrupt. Homeless once again, Crowley and Leah rented a room in an inn at Chelles, a village on the eastern outskirts of Paris. How they were going to pay the rent was unresolved.

Finally, in the middle of May, their luck changed when John Sullivan, in the company of a wealthy Argentinian, Alexander Zul Zolar, tracked them down, bringing with them money and food. Zolar was keen to study magic under Crowley, who, not surprisingly, immediately took him on as a student. Shortly afterwards, George Cecil Jones arrived. Crowley had been chasing him for money for months.

Throughout his life, Crowley was the beneficiary of a number of trusts. Some had been set up by friends or relatives who had not wanted their gifts or bequests frittered

away. Others originated from occult or magical organisations with which Crowley was associated. None were very large but they were secure. All were intended, ultimately, to save Crowley from himself. Jones was now the sole trustee of the trust fund Crowley himself had set up, from which he was entitled to some income, yet at the trustee's discretion. He had written to Jones explaining his plight, even enclosing doctors' certificates to validate his claim, but Jones had, in Crowley's opinion, not done well by him, despite having finally settled his bill at the Hotel de Blois and given him an allowance of two pounds per week to meet medical expenses. On reaching Chelles, Jones, much to Crowley's annoyance, brought no more money, just pecuniary advice Crowley was loath to hear.

While Crowley's situation stabilised somewhat, Mudd's deteriorated. In London, he was reduced to the lowest levels of poverty: indeed, Mudd was to place himself on the Metropolitan Asylums Board Homeless Poor list on 27 November 1926. His age was given as thirty-five, his hair brown, eyes blue and height 5 feet 4 inches; his profession was noted as literary agent ¸or library assistant: the writing on admissions form number 10513 is unclear . He was nevertheless working hard on Crowley's behalf and suggested that Crowley might sue the *Sunday Express* for libel. Crowley, still not having the money to employ a lawyer and afraid of Beaverbrook's power, decided against such a course of action. Instead, Mudd published an apologia in pamphlet form, *An Open Letter to Lord Beaverbrook*, the bulk of which Crowley wrote. It was mailed out to everyone Crowley hoped would come to his support. The famous, from Bertrand Russell down, received a copy. So, perversely, did Scotland Yard. It made not one iota of difference and was generally ignored.

The summer of 1924 passed. Crowley taught Zolar, although his current of magical energy was barely glimmering. Relations with Leah were tense but she continued to take dictation and, when he could summon up the physical strength, gave him sex. For a while, the immediate future, if not looking rosy, at least looked calm. That was soon to change.

Dorothy Olsen was a thirty-two-year-old American woman who, while undertaking a tour of Europe, visited Chelles on a virtual pilgrimage to meet Crowley, the Master Therion. She also had a bit of money. Crowley welcomed her, took a liking to her and initiated her into the A∴A∴, giving her the name Astrid. The inevitable happened. Crowley told Leah that the Secret Chiefs wanted him to go on a magical retirement in North Africa accompanied by Dorothy. And no one else. Leah was distraught, yet there was nothing she could do about it. She was deposed as Scarlet Woman. At the end of September, Crowley finished his lessons with Zolar, who later put them to good use writing a book entitled *The Encyclopaedia of Ancient and Forbidden Knowledge*, and took off with Dorothy for Tunis via Marseilles.

Leah was abandoned in Paris. She had no money and no companion, her health was poor and she was a drug addict. When a telegram arrived from Ninette, informing her that Alma had shown up at Cefalù and removed Hansi, her world seemed to be collapsing.

Likewise, Ninette's life was in turmoil. She was living in poverty in the abbey, permitted to stay on (so long as she paid the rent) by the owner, who was, after all, the father of her third child. His attentions had become oppressive and she had broken off her relationship, which only exacerbated the situation. To compound matters, she was again pregnant, by a young local Sicilian called Arturo Sabatini. Her sister, Helen, sent clothing to her for Howard, and both she and Alma Hirsig sent small sums of money when they could: her brother also sent what he could at irregular intervals. She additionally took in sewing, which contributed a few lire.

In July 1926, Ninette wrote to Crowley about applying for passports for Howard and Lulu. She wanted her son to go to America to live with relatives and be educated there. Although she had little money, Helen had sent her his fare through the US consul in Palermo. In another letter written at about this time, Ninette remarked to Jane Wolfe and Dorothy Olsen that, although she had lived for six years in Cefalù, she

did not feel it was her home and she was anxious to escape. As regards Crowley, she wrote, 'I do cling to him because I simply can not take care of my family alone! And I worry my head off with the burden of the responsibility I have so lightly assumed!' The burden was not the children but the hopes she harboured for their future.

Her own prospects worried her, too. 'I belong to no country,' she wrote to Jane Wolfe, 'and can't get out of Cefalù because I have no passport and no Consul will give me one, and no one to help or advise me!' She was keen to go to France, where Crowley had promised to take her and the children. She had asked him to find her a little house with a big garden where she could make a fresh start, but he did not. By the following March, Ninette was desperate and wrote to Jane Wolfe, 'I write to bid you and Beast an eternal Adieu.' She went on to say how she had now lived seven years in Cefalù, a time spent solely for the gratification of her senses, had indulged her body to the limit and was paying the price. 'My brain is giving way at a rapid rate, it is with great difficulty that I maintain a sane attitude towards people – my disorder will soon show itself and cause me to be taken away from the little ones.' Her next move, she divulged, was to request that the Sicilian authorities put her children in Crowley's charge should she finally lose her mind. 'I leave them to Beast if he cares to take them. I know these poor lambs will have to suffer for my misdeeds: it is heart-breaking to think about their suffering . . . My prospects are appalling. I shudder to look forward! The Gods have forsaken me!' In a postscript written the next day, she added that she would hold out until Crowley sent help. He eventually telegraphed five hundred francs to her but thought it was throwing good money after bad as the best course was to get her and the children out of Sicily. Her family, he thought, should be pressured to rescue her, commenting, 'anyone in an auto can do it.'

What subsequently happened to Ninette and the children is uncertain. She moved back to France, where her mother lived near Fontainebleau, and obtained employment as a seamstress

at 35 rue Fessart in Paris, working for a woman called Pauline Roland. In 1929 Crowley, who continued to correspond with Ninette, started to make enquiries into legally adopting Lulu, with whom he had also exchanged letters while she was at school in France. He had the agreement of the British immigration authorities to the child's entry into England so long as he was her guardian and was with her, but he was too late. Ninette, suffering from what she termed '*anémie cérébrale*', died some time in the early 1930s. Letters to her address were returned to sender. Lulu had vanished.

In a futile attempt to wrest her son back from her sister, Leah approached the American embassy in Paris. They refused to assist. On returning to her lodgings, she found her belongings in the street: the landlord had thrown her out. She contemplated suicide but somehow struggled on, her faith in Crowley as a man no doubt shaken, yet in him as a magician not reduced at all. She believed in *The Book of the Law*, the Law of Thelema and the work remaining to be done.

When Mudd returned broke from London, he found Leah in rags. The two of them made a pitiful sight as they wandered the Parisian streets. Like many in their position, they dreamed of re establishing the Abbey of Thelema somewhere, of how they might further the cause to which they had committed their lives. Mudd declared that it was imperative they carry on, clearing Crowley's name and typing up his autobiography Their dedication to the man who had so terribly let them down was remarkable. Leah tried to see everything in magical terms, believing that their poverty had to have symbolic meaning and purpose. She came to the conclusion that what was required of them was a new start, to be gained by them becoming magically married, despite Crowley's previous opposition. Mudd, who was still in love with her, agreed. They went to a restaurant, ordered a 'magical feast' in which the foods were of different symbolic colours, then retired to Leah's sparse lodging to consummate the act. Crowley, in the meantime, sent them orders from Tunisia to carry out rituals but nothing else.

Much has been made over the years of Crowley's behaviour

at this time, trying to come to terms with his rejection of his two most faithful followers. Leah's attraction had waned as her addiction grew worse and ravaged her looks. She still loved Crowley, both on a human as well as an astral level, but love was not enough for him. He was, as ever, restless and self-centred, a man who used those whom he found pliable, compliant or unquestioning. That Leah was perhaps, of all Crowley's women, the most suitable to be his Scarlet Woman, in that she was game to do anything for him (and to keep him), from being sodomised to going down on all fours with a goat, was eventually forgotten by him. She had served her purpose. However, it must be added that Crowley did, for a long time, love her, or pretend to love her, or think he loved her, in his way. She gave him everything he wanted in a woman: she appealed to his vanity, was open to abuse and degradation, was physically beautiful (until the drugs started to kick in and was a companion both in the magical and everyday senses. There was nothing her allegiance to him would not refuse. Yet he still callously dumped her. He might have been, in his eyes, a noble god, yet he behaved like an ignoble man.

As for Mudd, Crowley came to be filled with the utmost contempt for him. He summed up his feelings in his diary:

> *He* [Mudd] *has no real courage, will, or resource He is indeed the basest and grossest of all types of men I have ever seen And yet – how many noble qualities! But there is no doubt that he is personally loathsome I feel at present that I cannot bear close association with him I ought, I think, to communicate only via Lea – who seems not to mind so much She loves putrefaction that is her real title to be the Scarlet Woman (What a vast cup she must have to hold so much abomination as just that one lump of rotten meat!)*

Referring again to Mudd, he continued:

> *The above is by no means to be taken as indicating any lack on my part of great affection & respect for Frater O P V. So*

I suppose I can save him too, by beating him into some sort of shape It's the horribly amorphous mollusc in Mudd which gives him the nightmare quality which appals so irresistibly 'Hoglike abortion' is rather rough on the hogs and the abortions They have organic form, at their worst Mudd is 'a nearly liquid mass of loathsome of detestable putrescence' – but oh that 'nearly' He won't flow, he is a clammy poultice of sour war-bread He clings, he clogs he chokes ... The English language fails!

Crowley later thought that the best thing Mudd could do to further the Great Work was to get a highly paid job, take out hefty life insurance, marry Leah, name her the policy beneficiary, then kill himself.

In due course, Mudd not surprisingly came to see through Crowley. Finally, he concluded that his former master was a fake, a man who had betrayed not only him but all his other followers and, worse, the Secret Chiefs. After parting from Leah, he grew to consider that he, Norman Mudd, was the real teacher for whom the world had been waiting but, as the years went by, he lost this conviction Writing to Jane Wolfe from the Isle of Man in 1927, he said that if they were ever to meet again they should have to talk about the weather as he no longer had any interest in anything calling itself magic. He was to commit suicide on Guernsey on 16 May 1934, by sealing the legs of his trousers with cycle clips, filling them with stones and walking into the sea. When the police enquired into his past, it was found that he had been living in a London County Council Common Lodging House for the poor at 220 Arlington Road. They could trace no friends or relatives and he was buried in an unmarked pauper's grave in the New Cemetery, Guernsey.

While Leah and Mudd were struggling to survive in Paris and London, Crowley and Dorothy were engaged in sexual magic and the worship of Horus in Tunis. On reaching the city, they had checked in for a fortnight at the Hotel Majestic, from which they sent out telegrams soliciting money: some reached them, although from where is unclear. Most probably,

Dorothy's family was a primary source. Certainly, sufficient funds had arrived for them to pay their rent, eat and have a jeweller make the stone from Crowley's ring, which he had redeemed from a pawnshop just before they left Paris, into a pendant for Dorothy to wear on her forehead. From Tunis, they moved first to nearby Carthage then on to the picturesque coastal village of Sidi Bou Said. Here Crowley wrote and had printed a pamphlet entitled *To Man*, in which he pronounced his presence as a unique spiritual leader, the one for which the whole world had been waiting. With this task accomplished, he mailed copies to Mudd for distribution before taking Dorothy off to Sfax, then west towards Nefta by way of Gafsa and Tozeur. Once again, he hired camels and they set off along the northern rim of the Grand Erg Oriental in a south-westerly direction.

This was the route he had intended taking with Leah, Mudd and Mohammed ben Brahim. The landscape was desert, dry dunes and rocky outcrops with no permanent human habitation or water. On the way, they were subjected to what Crowley called a 'magical attack of flies' and met a desert sheikh whom Crowley said recognised him as a Secret Chief and threw an eighteen course banquet for him in his tent which included a whole roast sheep. Crossing what is now the border between Tunisia and Algeria, they eventually reached Touggourt. This was quite an achievement, for it meant they had traversed about 120 miles of desert Crowley was rejuvenated. His health improved with the exercise and his spirits were raised by being on an expedition again and in the company of a brand-new Scarlet Woman. Sex with Dorothy was good and he managed a homosexual coupling with an Arab on 6 November, which affirmed that his magical powers were on stream once more. The magical retirement, which was more of a magical holiday, ended when Crowley paid off the camels in Touggourt, he and Dorothy taking the train north to Biskra.

The whole adventure had taken them nearly three months. Dorothy had not been well for part of the time but this did

not unduly concern Crowley, although it did niggle him. More importantly, the time spent in the desert reduced his reliance upon drugs and could have been the stepping stone he needed towards finally breaking at least his heroin habit. Yet no sooner was he back in civilisation than he returned to rashly dosing himself. The opportunity was lost.

After wintering in Europe, mostly in Paris, Crowley and Dorothy returned to Tunis in the spring of 1925. They were short of money and much of their sex magic was directed toward obtaining some income for Dorothy and, therefore, Crowley. In addition, they sent letters to her family and friends in America, asking for loans and informing them of the fact that they hoped to marry. One night, Crowley had a vision while in a trance or, more accurately, while high on heroin and, probably, hashish. He wrote this down immediately afterwards and it was published thirteen years later in a slim volume called *The Heart of the Master*. The author was one Khaled Khan, aka Crowley.

By now Mudd had returned to Britain, his magical marriage to Leah on hold. She had spent most of the latter half of 1924 living in Paris as a common prostitute, operating under the name of Mrs E.G. Lord and being summonsed for solicitation by the police under that name. Sex with her clients occasionally took on magical proportions, but the simple truth was that she had been forced by circumstance (and Crowley) into professional whoredom. She still corresponded with him and possessed items of his which he had left behind: she knew she should, yet she could not, make the final break from him. Not wishing to be a burden upon him, she wrote telling him not to feel materially responsible for her and, eventually, she separated their belongings into two piles, writing to him to ask what she should do with his possessions. Her letters to him were now formal: she no longer addressed him familiarly and lovingly as 'Dear Beast' or 'Beautiful Big Bugger Lion' but simply by his initials. Her last letter to him in September 1930, and dictated to Mudd, begins 'Dear Sir' and ends 'Yours truly'.

In January 1925, Leah obtained employment as a *plongeuse* – a kitchen dogsbody – in a small restaurant in Montparnasse,

where she also waited upon tables. The hours were long, the work hard and the pay abysmal, but it was money and it got her, at least temporarily, off the streets. Writing to Jane Wolfe, with whom she had stayed in touch, she said, 'Feeling very fit – expect that means I'll get a nasty knock soon from a new quarter. Who cares so long as the curtain only falls to rise again.' It looked as if, although her health was still poor, she was at last turning the corner and getting back her own life. Then, in March, she received the anticipated nasty knock, except that it came from an old quarter. Crowley wanted her in Tunis. She went.

Dorothy Olsen was pregnant. Crowley wanted Leah to attend her through her pregnancy. He also needed help with her. She was, in the usual way of Crowley's women, over the first flush of romantic or magical adrenaline and was becoming awkward. Her health and spirits were also low, no doubt because she had started taking drugs. When Leah arrived, Dorothy's state of mind, already made somewhat fragile by her general participation in magic as well as her association with Crowley, broke. Crowley's magical diary for 24 April explains the situation: 'A single drink of rum (on top of a good deal of mental worry during the day) was enough to induce in DO an attack of acute mania. Lying in bed, close cuddled, I nearly asleep, she suddenly started to scratch my face without the least warning, with a spate of the filthiest incoherent abuse of me and everybody connected with me. There had been a good deal of irritation and snappiness during the afternoon and evening, with one or two beginnings of the regular ravings; but no one took any notice, and they subsided.' This physical attack might well have been retributive, for it was not unknown for Crowley to hit Dorothy in frustration.

Leah's trip to Tunis was to prove unnecessary for Dorothy had a miscarriage and, at the end of May, she and Crowley left for France. Once again Leah was abandoned to her fate, but was no longer worried. This was to be an act of catharsis for her. She had neither work nor money, but she was detaching herself from Crowley and she was not without friends in Tunis.

One of these was Gérard Aumont, the French translator of *The Diary of a Drug Fiend*; another was a man she had met in Paris, William George Barron, who was interested in magic and had been her partner for magical sex acts. She became pregnant by him and gave birth to a son, Alexander, in Leipzig on 4 December 1925, asking Jane Wolfe to send her a 'sensible practical book on the subject of children, modern but not *too* hygienic.' She also told Jane, at the time she gave birth to the boy, that she was old enough to have been the grandmother of every other baby in the maternity ward: the other mothers were aged fifteen to twenty four but she was well into her forties. At first, she had been apprehensive of having the child, but she soon grew to love him and devote herself to his upbringing.

As time passed, Leah began to see Crowley in a different light. Her admiration for him faded, both as a man and a mage. She came to regard her love for him as a mental aberration, a disease which she called 'A.C.-itis' for which she had to find a remedy. A major part of her cure was a formal disclaimer she mailed from Switzerland in December 1929. Sent to everyone she knew who was or had been involved with Crowley, it revoked her position as the Scarlet Woman: a considerable act of catharsis, it was her final cutting free.

After leaving her in Tunis, Crowley hardly ever referred to Leah again. She does not appear thereafter in his diaries. For a time, she and Mudd lived together in Germany where members of the German OTO gave them succour, but Crowley, when he heard of this, issued a statement from Paris denouncing her and ordering the OTO to cut off contact with her. He also demanded that no one communicate with her on the subject of *The Book of the Law* or the Law of Thelema, which she was still studying and by the concepts of which she tried to live, believing it to be more important than her former master and lover. At one point, Crowley gave her an opportunity to make up with him. He thought Mudd had stolen some of his books and sold them. If she would confirm his accusations, Crowley would forgive her her transgressions against him. By now, however, Leah's view of Crowley was much altered and she refused

to grass on her one-time magical husband. Crowley was so infuriated he mailed out a circular officially repudiating her.

What happened to Leah thereafter is largely speculative. It was said she returned to America, converted to Roman Catholicism and, completely discarding all magical practices, reverted to being a schoolmistress once more, teaching music. She died in 1951. When John Symonds was researching his biography of Crowley in 1949, one of her sisters contacted him and requested that he suppress her name. Symonds obliged and Crowley's most famous and long-suffering Scarlet Woman was temporarily known as Leah Faesi.

17

Problems, Prophesies and the Rich Man from the West

In 1922, Theodor Reuss, who had been ill for several years, suffered a stroke and resigned as head of the OTO but, before he died the following year, he apparently named Crowley as his heir. There is some confusion over this. Late in 1921, Reuss and Crowley had had a falling out over the latter arbitrarily appointing himself head of the OTO in Australia. In a letter to Reuss dated 23 November 1921, Crowley stated bluntly, 'It is my will to be O.H.O. [the Outer Head of the Order] and Frater Superior of the Order and avail myself of your abdication – to proclaim myself as such' and, four days later, he declared in his diary, 'I have proclaimed myself O.H.O. Frater Superior of the Order of Oriental Templars.' Yet, in his autobiography, Crowley said that Reuss resigned in his favour in 1922, and he later told Charles Stansfeld Jones that 'in the O.H.O.'s last letter to me he invited me to become his successor as O.H.O. and Frater Superior.' This letter, however, has never been found: on the other hand, neither has any document to the contrary.

In Berlin, Crowley's ascendancy to the leadership did not go down well. The German members of the OTO were reluctant to be led by an Englishman and the order was taken over, pro tem, by Heinrich Tranker. The leadership schism would have lasted had not Tranker received a vision in which he saw Crowley as a Secret Chief. Consequently, he called a conclave at the small town of Hohenleuben, twenty miles west of Zwickau, in the summer of 1925. Crowley, who was back in Paris, was invited to attend with Dorothy Olsen, Leah Hirsig and Norman

Mudd. Money still being a problem, fares for Crowley's little entourage were met by OTO members in Germany. Crowley's debts in Paris were settled and his fare paid by a wealthy man called Karl Johannes Germer, who was, at the time, acting as Tränker's assistant.

Born at Elberfeld in Germany in 1885, Germer was highly educated, had lived part of his teenage years in London and had attended the Sorbonne. During the 1914–18 war, he served in the German Army on the Western Front and in Russia, and as an intelligence officer was highly decorated for 'special services'. He was a member of the OTO (in which his name was Frater Saturnus) as well as one of a select group of occult societies collectively known as Pansophia, of which Tranker was the leader. Around 1920, he was made a senior executive with Barth-Verlag, a Munich publishing company. His publishing expertise was used to produce an occult magazine, *Pansophia*, and, later, in running Thelema-Verlag, a small Crowleyan publishing company. Germer was to be one of Crowley's most dedicated followers and his main source of income. They worked closely together even when Germer was in America, where he travelled and lived off and on for some years. As far as Crowley was concerned, he regarded Germer as the rich man from the West whose arrival had been prophesied in *The Book of the Law*.

Ahead of the meeting, Crowley sent a copy of *The Book of the Law* which was translated into German. Reuss had already attacked it as containing communistic tendencies, and his low opinion was echoed at the meeting. Tranker at first condemned it but then underwent a change of mind and praised it effusively. He was worried. In Crowley he rightly saw a threat to his status and was jockeying for position.

The conference split into pro- and anti-Crowley factions. Tranker and his followers announced that they would keep Pansophia separate from the OTO: they needed to maintain their power base. This folded the following year and was reborn as the Fraternitas Saturni, which exists to this day, accepting a modified version of the Law of Thelema and Crowley as a prophet, but nothing more. When Pansophia broke up, Tranker and a few die-hards went their own way and disappeared.

Crowley was backed by Germer and an elderly German woman, Martha Kuntzel. She was a theosophist and friend of Madame Blavatsky, who had been in occult circles all her adult life. Although far from wealthy, she let Leah Hirsig and Mudd stay in her small home at Tiefestrasse 4 in Leipzig, supporting them when Crowley abandoned them to their fates. Leah gave this address to the hospital authorities when she gave birth to Barron's son.

When the meeting ended, Crowley was indubitably the ultimate leader of the OTO. His position was secure, although Tränker was to half heartedly try to wrest it from him over the next few years, and he was happy. This contentment was due to more than his new role. While in Germany, he came across a newly registered asthma drug which allowed him to cut down on his heroin intake.

Thanks to Germer, and income received from the OTO, Crowley was once again solvent. While he was certainly not rich, he was now comfortably off and able to allow himself some further self-indulgences. He returned to Paris, basing himself there, but his restlessness did not abate and, over the coming years, he travelled widely around western Europe and North Africa.

In January 1926, he and Dorothy were back in La Marsa, but their relationship was coming to an end. Crowley was forever on the hunt for the next Scarlet Woman. By May, he had already interviewed a few likely candidates. Dorothy, he realised, had little magical potential and what she did possess was fading fast. She was also neurotic and frequently annoyed Crowley. After he left her, she became an alcoholic and drank herself to death around 1930.

Her place was filled with a quick succession of quasi- or would-be Scarlet Women. These included Ninette ('a full Martinique Negress', not to be confused with Ninette Shumway), Katherine ('a superb natural vampire') and Margaret Binetti, whom Crowley met in the late summer of 1926, to whom he proposed marriage and became engaged, but whom he dropped on 6 February 1927 'by burning the talisman of Jupiter

which protected her. Her callous heartlessness and hypocritical falsity doom her to a dire end.' According to Crowley's own reckoning, he had six white and three black mistresses on the go in January 1927 but was 'eliminating these one by one.' Clearly, the criteria for a Scarlet Woman had been lowered somewhat from the days of Leila Waddell, who had not herself qualified as such. When Clifford Bax asked Crowley, towards the end of his life, what had become of the Queen of Heaven (referring to a photograph of Leila), Crowley perfunctorily replied, 'Year and name, please.'

Not only women came to Crowley's attention. So did a number of young men, although none were destined to be the next Neuburg. One of these was Francis Israel Regardie. Born in England in 1907, he had moved with his family to America in 1920 where, as a teenager, he had read some of Crowley's work and become fascinated not only by the content of it but also by the character of its author. At the age of eighteen, he had gone to a meeting in Washington at which some of Crowley's work was read out and discussed. Soon after this, Regardie wrote to Crowley, who put him in touch with Germer, who was by now in America. They met and became friends. With Germer's encouragement, Regardie corresponded with Crowley and, in 1928, accepted Crowley's invitation to study with him in Paris and be his (unpaid) secretary.

No sooner had Regardie arrived, in October, than he handed over to Crowley his meagre savings of $1,200, which Crowley promptly spent on luxuries such as champagne and brandy. Moving into Crowley's apartment at 55 Avenue de Suffren, he took up his duties with youthful eagerness, readily fitting in with Crowley's exhausting lifestyle, which encompassed a surfeit of decadent, often extravagant, living and a deficit of sleep. Regardie, whom Crowley nicknamed the Serpent, became the butt of Crowley's wit, sarcasm and, at times, anger, when he called him a worm. Despite these insults, Regardie stayed with Crowley for three years, learning a great deal of magical knowledge. In later years, he was to become one of the most fair-minded, unbiased commentators on Crowley's life and work.

As Regardie was discovering Crowley and his work in America, another young man called Gerald Joseph Yorke was coming upon him in Britain. Like Neuburg, Yorke had been up at Trinity College, Cambridge, where he read history, graduating in 1923. He was a nephew of the 6th Earl of Hardwicke and a cousin of the 1st Baron Egremont. His father was a successful businessman and a well-to-do Gloucestershire landowner, with a substantial estate called Forthampton Court near Tewkesbury, while his mother was the Hon. Maude Wyndham, a daughter of the 2nd Baron Leconfield. Educated at Eton College, Yorke was wealthy, intelligent, well connected and athletic, having played first-class cricket for the Gloucestershire county team. In many ways, he was similar to Crowley in his mid-twenties, but nothing like as self-indulgent or financially reckless.

After reading several issues of *The Equinox*, Yorke became curious about what Crowley's philosophy was and determined to meet him. Crowley invited him to Paris and must have thought he had hit gold dust when he found out than Yorke was flying over: to fly was then the prerogative only of the very rich. They met at Paris airport in 1928 and went on almost immediately to Cassis, a resort near Marseilles, for a fortnight's intensive magical instruction. Soon after, Yorke joined the A∴A∴ and was named Frater Volo Intelligere, or I Wish for Knowledge.

The knowledge Yorke already possessed was of greater use to Crowley than any he could impart. Yorke was, for all his tender years, a shrewd businessman, and he proposed taking charge of Crowley's finances. Pointing out to Crowley that he was a poor judge of running his own affairs, with which analysis Crowley concurred, Yorke devised a funding structure to manage Crowley's life. He and Germer would periodically pay money into an account, Crowley adding to it that which he obtained elsewhere, for example from the OTO or the trust run by Jones. From this central coffer, Crowley would then be able to draw living expenses and the costs of publishing his work. Any receipts from the sales of books went into this account. The system was to run for some time and, after that, in a much adapted form for the remainder of Crowley's life, with Yorke acting in the earlier years

as his personal finance manager. Yorke also took over promoting Crowley and the OTO in Britain, while Germer did likewise in America, where he eventually established a headquarters in New York.

While Regardie resided with Crowley, Yorke did not, but he frequently visited him from England. Living with Crowley was tiring and uncomfortable. He kept odd hours and insisted on playing chess every evening. On occasion, he would play Yorke and Regardie simultaneously, beating them both even if he could not see the game boards. He smoked incessantly, usually large Havana cigars or a curly Sherlock Holmesian pipe filled with pungent perique or latakia tobacco, which aggravated his asthma. He also consumed large quantities of brandy. Although both Regardie and Yorke admired Crowley, and accepted his whims, they were both cautious of him. Neither were homosexuals and they feared Crowley making such advances to them. He never did.

Someone who was a homosexual and came to know Crowley was Thomas Driberg. Preferring to be called Tom, Driberg had been expelled from Lancing College, the top public school, for practising his homosexuality there. In 1924, he went up to Christ Church, Oxford, on a scholarship, actively joined the Communist Party, left the university under a cloud in 1927, and joined the staff of Beaverbrook's *Daily Express* as a journalist. During his second year up at Oxford, he wrote to Crowley out of curiosity rather than any sense of magical ambition, arranging to meet him when he was next in London. They lunched together at a restaurant called the Tour Eiffel in Percy Street, Driberg more than aware that he was dining with one of society's pariahs and just as aware that it would enhance his bohemian, risk-taking reputation among his fellow students. They were to remain in touch for many years, Crowley occasionally receiving money from Driberg, who went on to become a very prominent Labour Party Member of Parliament and a life peer: he was also posthumously proven to have been, for the last twenty years of his life, an active Russian spy with the code name Lepage. At some stage he acquired – most likely

through devious means: he claimed he got it from a showground magician who would not himself admit how he had obtained it — one of Crowley's diaries, bound in red morocco leather and edged with silver, which he subsequently sold for a very substantial sum to Jimmy Page, the lead guitarist with the rock band Led Zeppelin and an avid collector of Crowleyana. When Crowley died, Driberg demanded that the executors give him back all his correspondence.

By late 1928, Crowley's roster of quasi-Scarlet Women was reduced somewhat. The role was variously taken by a Countess Czesky (or Czecky) and, towards the end of the year, a Polish woman called Kasimira Bass. She had greatly shocked Regardie on their first meeting. After dinner, without any ado, she and Crowley started having sex right in front of the newly arrived secretary. Regardie, embarrassed and nonplussed, left the room.

A description of Crowley during this period of his life was given by Lance Sieveking in his book *The Eye of the Beholder*. Coming across him at Cassis, he noted that Crowley was paunchy, with several teeth missing, and dressed in crumpled white cotton trousers, a pale mauve shirt and sandals.

> *As he talked* [Sieveking recalled] *I was surprised to see that his tongue was strangely fat and swollen, and of a peculiar dark purple in colour, quite different from the dull red of his lips. The round dome of his head was completely bald but for three long black hairs of unusual thickness which stood up like ferns from the top of the dome. His ears were very large and, except that they did not hang downwards, reminded me of elephant's ears. His face, though it was deeply sunburnt, was actually more green than brown. Under his eyes were deep saucers of black. His skin, which, though the face was fat, was loose in a fat sort of way, moved as he talked as an elephant's skin moves. The texture too, reminded me of an elephant's skin.*

Crowley's sickly appearance was hardly surprising. His health was poor and he was imbibing a fair cocktail of assorted prescribed drugs at the time. Prescriptions from a Dr Robert

de Gennes, whose surgery Crowley regularly visited in Paris, show that he was taking not only a number of lesser medicines such as bismuth and cough syrups but also heroin, cocaine, adrenaline and strychnine.

Kasimira was unusual among Crowley's Scarlet Women in that she walked out on him, yet when the time came she did not have the courage to tell him to his face and asked Regardie to break the news. When Crowley was told, he merely remarked, 'The Lord hath given. The Lord hath taken away. Blessed be the name of the Lord.'

The reason Crowley was none too concerned was because his next Scarlet Woman was in sight. Although Crowley nicknamed her Old Nile, she was in fact a middle-aged, wealthy Nicaraguan of Franco-Italian descent called Maria Teresa Sanchez, née Ferrari. Previously married and with a child, she was an exotic woman and had, according to Crowley, substantial magical potential – as all his women did, at first. This earned her another nickname, the High Priestess of Voodoo. Arthur Calder-Marshall, in his memoirs, *The Magic of My Youth*, described her as one of the most remarkable women upon whom he had ever set eyes. When they first met in December 1929, she was wearing a black-and-white satin dress, black fishnet stockings and four-inch high heels. Her hair was jet black and long, 'her face like a small clearing in a jungle only prevented from reverting to secondary scrub by intensive cultivation.' Her eyes were dark and heavily mascara-ed while her fingernails were 'lacquered the red of venous blood.' Her lips were thin but exaggerated, painted into a Cupid's bow. Regardie and Yorke considered her otherwise: the former said she was overpowering, the latter that she was large and clumsy.

It goes without saying that Crowley saw her as magnificent. With her, he wrote early in their relationship, he was 'able to start serious magick with ritual precautions. The climax of the first ceremony was marked as it should be, by the sudden arising of a violent wind; and subsequent ceremonies have been equally notable. I think the results are already beginning to appear; and, bar accidents, something important should break out during the

week.' She was besotted with him and utterly convinced of his magical powers.

The reference to her as a voodoo priestess might not have been far off the mark, for Maria does seem to have had her own magical abilities. With Yorke and Regardie, she conducted a ritual in Crowley's apartment in Paris when he was absent. It had its basis in her having danced to the Devil as a young woman. As the two young men chanted verses, she danced, passing her hands and bare feet through candle flames until finally collapsing. Both Yorke and Regardie said they had felt a presence come into the room during the ceremony.

For Crowley, 1929 was an important publication year, for it saw the appearance of *Magick*. The most enduring of his books, it brought together many of his magical teachings, contained an explanation of what magick was, outlined some basic Golden Dawn rituals with others Crowley had devised, and illustrated the place of Thelema in the overall picture. The production costs were met by Germer and Yorke, who paid money into the central account before setting off to find a printer. Most refused the commission but one, the Lecram Press in Paris, finally accepted it, although they demanded a higher than average price for the risk they thought they were taking in producing a book of magic by Crowley.

When it was published, both in a single hardback volume and as four paperbacks, it received virtually no public attention, much to Crowley's disappointment, as he had hoped it would revitalise his reputation. With no distributor willing to accept the book, it was hawked around bookshops in London by Gerald Yorke and a few other OTO or A∴A∴ members and friends.

In France, the book indirectly caused Crowley a lot of trouble. The story is both tangled and bizarre. While correcting the proofs, Crowley employed a journalist called C. de Vidal Hunt to promote it. His salary was twenty pounds per month plus expenses. Yorke, upon hearing this, was not pleased and, as Hunt had done virtually nothing in the first month, he fired him. There was, however, something else going on of which Yorke was ignorant. Hunt, with others, was apparently attempting to

arrange a marriage between an American millionairess in Paris and a poverty stricken minor member of the Spanish royal family. How Crowley became involved in such a scheme lay in his astrological knowledge. Hunt, it appears, asked him to assist in brokering the marriage by casting a spurious horoscope which would show that the two parties were ideally suited to each other. Crowley refused to compromise his astrological integrity. Hunt threatened to expose Crowley if he did not oblige. Crowley held firm. The plan came to nothing and Crowley felt obliged to warn the millionairess. In doing so, he denounced Hunt, who, in retaliation, denounced Crowley to the Sûreté. A police investigation into Crowley was instigated. On 17 January 1929, a police inspector arrived at Crowley's apartment.

Ostensibly, the first police visit was to look into Hunt's allegation that Crowley was using illegal drugs. Crowley and the policeman had a conversation during which the officer thought Crowley's coffee percolator was a cocaine distilling machine, asked him if he took drugs and why he was known as the King of Depravity in England. After this, the officer left. Crowley thought that was the end of the matter but, four weeks later, he received a *refus de séjour*, in essence a deportation order, covering himself, Maria and Regardie. The grounds for the decision to deport were several Partly, the French authorities thought Crowley might be a German agent. his pro-German journalism during the war and his links to the German based OTO (and his position as its leader) were considered sufficient reason for suspicion. There was, however, another reason for the expulsion. It came from Regardie's sister. Shortly after Regardie left to join Crowley in France, his sister found some copies of *The Equinox* her brother had left behind at home and read of Crowley's sexual rituals. Afraid for her brother, she applied to the French embassy in America to refuse him a visa, but it was too late. The embassy, however, contacted the French government, which started to dig into Crowley's past, learned of his deportation from Sicily, and set the wheels of their own expulsion process in motion.

On 9 March, the trio were given twenty-four hours to get out of France. Crowley succeeded in postponing his deportation on

grounds of ill health, although his real reason for staying was to finish seeing his book through production. Regardie and Maria obtained British visas but, on arrival in Britain, were refused entry as undesirable aliens and were obliged to return to France by the same steam packet. Back where they came from, they succeeded in getting Belgian visas and left for Brussels.

By mid-April, Crowley was ready to join them. He had seen an advance copy of his book and left France in, as he put it, 'a blaze of publicity', which amounted to newspaper articles reporting his deportation. The coverage, though international, was not extensive, although the somewhat obscure *The Star* in New Zealand did go to the lengths of interviewing Crowley, who gave his own perspective on the matter under the headline 'Black Magic Denied. Former Spy's Exploits. Ordered to Quit Paris.' After outlining his early life, including mentioning that he had been 'received at Thibet by the sacred lamas', the article quoted Crowley's explanation of his 'espionage' activities in America and enquired whether he was guilty in France of offences against morality. 'There is no accusation against me,' Crowley was quoted as saying. 'My sweetheart was expelled. She was told that a service was being rendered to her by separating her from me. When she demanded what it was the French authorities had against me they suggested I was a trafficker in cocaine. This is ridiculous . . . I have lived in Paris for seven years. I have led a peaceable life, writing during the day, and playing chess at my club in the evenings .. My case can be likened to that of Dreyfus.' The article ended with a French press report that Crowley was said to be able to see through walls and 'dislodge himself' from his body. It noted that he came to prominence in 1911 when Augustus John painted his portrait – a snippet of supposed insalubrious news picked up from the *Sunday Express* articles in 1922 – had been attacked for running the abbey at Cefalù ('where degenerate rites were said to be carried on') and was the author of *The Diary of a Drug Fiend.*

Dreyfus or not, Crowley was by now being regarded more as a mildly celebrated curiosity than an *enfant terrible.* His sitting for the now internationally famous Augustus John was considered

a greater basis for his reputation than all of his magical activity and declarations of being the teacher for which the world was waiting. An article in the *Daily Sketch* in 1929 actually portrayed him as a clever man whose reputation was the subject of much hyperbole and, through people like Driberg, he even occasionally moved in society, meeting the likes of Nancy Cunard, whom he was said to have interrupted in mid-conversation with a request that he be permitted to give her a Serpent's Kiss. She acquiesced, whereupon Crowley bit her on the wrist. Later, she claimed the bite had given her blood poisoning.

On his deportation from France, however, Crowley briefly visited Belgium, then went on to London to see Gerald Yorke, who had himself received a call from the police just before Crowley's arrival. The officer who called on him was Lt Col. John Fillis Carré Carter, a deputy assistant commissioner of the Metropolitan Police and a very senior member of the Special Branch at Scotland Yard, whom Yorke knew well through masonic connections. He warned Yorke about associating with Crowley. Yorke, in return, invited Carter to dinner to meet Crowley, to show that the mage and magician was not all the press had painted him to be. Carter accepted the invitation and, on 11 June 1929, a pleasant evening was had by all. It was to lead to other things.

Marooned in Belgium with little money, Regardie and Maria were thrust together as Mudd and Leah had been, with a similar result: Maria seduced Regardie. Regardie was understandably nervous as to how Crowley would react when he found out, but this was the least of his worries. The Belgian authorities wanted the two Crowleyites out. Crowley – already furious with the British authorities for refusing them entry: Regardie, after all, was actually British born and should have been allowed entry by right – grew even angrier. He contacted Germer for help and a plan was put into action.

Going to Brussels, Germer collected Maria and took her to Leipzig to stay with Martha Kuntzel. Crowley joined her and, on 16 August 1929, they were married. *The Times*, reporting the event, called Crowley a mystic writer: once again, his claim to

fame was given as his travels and his John portrait. The marriage was one of convenience, not romance. Crowley wanted Maria to have a right of abode in Britain: she was, after all, a good magical partner and he was loath to lose her. Yet.

At around this time, Regardie was given permission to enter Britain. Strings had been pulled. It is not certain who pulled them but the odds are it was Carter of Scotland Yard, who was willing to oblige Crowley, for he was preparing the way for Crowley to owe him a favour or two, which could be called in later. Crowley, all the while, supported Regardie, giving him money and, when he reached London, sending him to his tailor in Jermyn Street. There, Regardie was instructed to have some clothes made, the bill for which was to be sent to Crowley. Regardie, pleased at this generosity, went to the tailor and was measured for a suit. The bill was never paid.

When, in 1929, Betty May published her autobiography, *Tiger Woman*, Crowley might reasonably have feared a backlash in the press. At the very least, the mention of Cefalù might have kicked up the dust. Yet there was no outrage. The world was moving on, the Roaring Twenties had happened, and a villa in the sun full of erotically inclined eccentrics was a little passé.

Shortly after it was published, Crowley wrote to Anthony Powell, the novelist, who had been the editor at Duckworth & Company responsible for bringing Betty May's book out. They met for lunch at the fashionable Simpson's, in the Strand, Crowley informing Powell (somewhat unnecessarily) that he could be recognised because he'd be the one man not wearing a rose in his lapel. Powell went to the lunch with some misgivings, yet the Crowley he met was not what he expected. Instead of a powerful figure, he was confronted with 'a big weary looking man [who] rose from one of the seats and held out his hand. He was quietly, almost shabbily, dressed in a dark brown suit and grey Homburg hat. When he removed the hat the unusual formation of his bald and shaven skull was revealed; so shaped as to give the impression that he was wearing a false top to his head like a clown's.' His face was 'dull yellow in complexion, the features strangely caught together within the midst of a

large elliptical area, like those of a horrible baby, the skin of porous texture, much mottled, perhaps from persistent use of drugs.' Powell considered him absurd yet still 'sinister, intensely sinister, both in exterior and manner', but later qualified this by adding, 'a sinister but gifted buffoon.'

Over lunch, Crowley criticised *Tiger Woman* for its inaccuracies, talked about his life and expressed a bitterness at the way the press - and the world – had treated him. Powell listened politely and stored away the images he received. In the last volume of his epic series of novels, *A Dance to the Music of Time*, Crowley appears, translocated into the 1960s, as a character named Scorpio Murtlock.

Crowley's own autobiography, dictated in the main to Leah Hirsig and commissioned then cancelled by William Collins in 1922, now found a publisher. The Mandrake Press, in Museum Street, Bloomsbury, close to the British Museum, had just been set up by Edward Goldston, a bookseller, and his Australian partner, Percival Reginald Stephensen. Their first book, a limited edition entitled *The Paintings of D H Lawrence*, had sold well and gained them a following. Stephensen was tasked with finding new books and, although – perhaps in part because – he was a communist, he admired the concepts of the Law of Thelema and thought highly of Crowley's literary ability. On 28 June, he paid Crowley an advance against royalties of fifty pounds. The book was planned to appear in six volumes under the title *The Spirit of Solitude – An Autohagiography Subsequently re-Antichristened The Confessions of Aleister Crowley*. The first the public heard of it was, ironically, under the William Hickey byline in Beaverbrook's *Daily Express*. The column was written by Tom Driberg, who, through it, invented the modern gossip column.

Although it was published as a limited edition, it was still hoped that the book might be carried by distributors and stocked by bookshops, yet, when the first volumes appeared, booksellers were distinctly lacking in enthusiasm. Crowley's name on the cover was enough to condemn it: most assumed it was either erotic or esoteric – or both – without even reading it. Had they had the foresight to open the book, they would have

realised they had a potential bestseller on their hands. It was neither obscene nor obscure but truly confessional, often very witty, honest, arrogant and utterly gripping. Volumes three to six were not issued at this time and the work was not to be fully published until 1969, when an abridged, single-volume edition appeared, edited by John Symonds and Kenneth Grant. It has remained in print ever since.

In addition to his autobiography, the Mandrake Press also published a small volume of stories entitled *The Stratagem* and, in October, the novel *Moonchild*.

As might have been expected, Crowley was soon to fall out with Goldston and Stephensen. He then persuaded Gerald Yorke and Germer to invest £1,000 in the press, in addition to a separate investment by Robin Thynne, a relative of the Marquis of Bath. This gave them all a seat on the board. Crowley then diverted half the investment to another ailing company, the Aquila Press. This haemorrhage of funds put paid to the Mandrake Press and did little to stop the other firm from going under. In November 1930, the Mandrake Press went into liquidation partly, according to Crowley, because Thynne had asset-stripped it and Yorke was reluctant to bale it out. The closure of the Press scuppered the chances of Crowley's books doing well.

Sales may have been low, but the publication of the books did lead to Crowley receiving an invitation from Arthur Calder Marshall, who was the undergraduate president of the University of Oxford Poetry Society, to address the members on the evening of 3 February 1930. Crowley accepted with alacrity and began to prepare a lecture on Gilles de Rais, the medieval French occultist. Then the university authorities got to hear of it. The university's Roman Catholic chaplain, the famous biblical scholar Father Ronald Knox, wrote to the Poetry Society's secretary, an undergraduate called Hugh Speaight. He contacted Crowley and cancelled the booking. 'It has come to our knowledge [he wrote] that if your proposed paper is delivered, disciplinary action will be taken, involving not only myself but the rest of the committee of the Society.'

No doubt recalling the threats Mudd had received at

Cambridge in 1907. Crowley, who was temporarily renting a property called Ivy Cottage at Knockholt, between Orpington and Sevenoaks in Kent, was incensed and, unwisely and naively, promptly published his banned lecture as a pamphlet, writing to Arthur Calder-Marshall and asking him to arrange for men with sandwich boards to wander the streets of Oxford selling it. About fifty copies were purchased before news got around that the contents were trite. The national papers picked up the story, Crowley laying down a challenge to the university authorities and speculating that Knox cancelled the lecture because Gilles de Rais ('a comrade of Joan of Arc', Crowley remarked acidly) was accused of killing six hundred children in ritual murder and he had had the same accusation levelled at him. 'Probably,' Crowley considered with typical sardonic humour, 'the authorities are afraid that I may kill and eat 800 Oxford undergraduates.' In the *Birmingham Evening Dispatch*, however, Crowley gave a measured opinion of the cause of the ban: it was because of Loveday's 'dubious' death.

Despite – perhaps because of – the press interest, the ban was not revoked and the Mandrake Press published the lecture as a pamphlet priced sixpence. It made tedious reading and paid Crowley no service. However, a book which did was written by Stephensen himself. Appearing in July 1930, it was hastily produced in paperback but has proved of immense value to Crowley scholars and followers ever since. Pompously entitled *The Legend of Aleister Crowley – Being a Study of the Documentary Evidence Relating to a Campaign of Personal Vilification Unparalleled in Literary History*, it was a collection of press cuttings covering Crowley's entire life, linked with biographical and critical comment. The aim of the book was to defuse some of the antagonism expressed towards Crowley by the press and public, at the same time smoothing the way for the sales of his books, which were not going well.

The book did not sell widely, but it received a rare, lengthy and encouraging review in the 24 August 1930 issue of the *Freethinker*, which defended Crowley, putting his reputation in context and treating him with even-handed gravity. It attacked

Bottomley and the 'cunninger and more degraded jackals of Fleet Street', castigated 'the howling mob of interested pietists who every now and then raise the wind in the Silly Season by shrieking with inspired vituperation' at Crowley and ended by making 'a plea for ordinary human toleration, addressed by a Freethinker to his fellow Freethinkers', although this was qualified by a disclaimer of much of what Crowley had done and for which he stood.

The article, headed 'A fair plea for fair play', was written by Victor Neuburg. He may long since have disassociated himself from the now notorious Crowley, but he continued to support him.

Throughout the summer of 1930, while living at 89 Park Mansions, Knightsbridge, Crowley attempted to exhibit his paintings in London, but no gallery was prepared to accept him. Goldston refused to hang the pictures at the Mandrake Press office, aggravating the rift forming between Crowley and his publishers, because he wanted to avoid the type of scandal he had recently suffered by D.H. Lawrence's paintings having been removed by the police from an exhibition he (as Lawrence's art publisher had organised, charged with being obscene. Crowley, preparing to rent an apartment in Langham Place, thought to exhibit his work at the Aquila Press near by, but *John Bull* published a damning article and the renting agent ceased negotiations. His plans foiled, Crowley selected 160 drawings and paintings, shipping them to Berlin. After a farewell party at which Maria collapsed drunk, Crowley set off for Berlin on 1 August, alone. His marriage to Maria was clearly foundering.

Arriving in Berlin, Crowley was welcomed by the press. He was in his element. No one was attacking him, the OTO was doing well and he was its leader, and, at the studio of an artist acquaintance, he met a nineteen-year-old artist called Hanni Jaeger. He nicknamed her the Monster and recorded in his diary, 'I am quite in love with this Hanni', later adding, 'Met and won Hanni Jaeger Dismissed wife, without notice.'

Within weeks, Crowley decided it was time for a magical retirement although, by now, this meant little more than a

vacation. He was involving himself less and less in magic, hardly performing any ritual or sexual magic, except with a single female companion, and doing virtually no teaching. It was as if he had even grown tired of the occult, as if it had, like the women in his life, served its purpose and was now albeit temporarily cast aside.

In the company of Hanni, he returned briefly to London, then headed south by sea from Southampton, bound for Lisbon. The choice of destination was not arbitrary. Crowley had a correspondent to visit.

For over a year, he had been exchanging letters with Fernando Pessoa, Portugal's most famous poet, who invited Crowley to call on him should he ever stop off in Lisbon. Pessoa, who wrote both in Portuguese and English, being utterly fluent in both languages, was interested in the myth of Pan. He translated the *Hymn to Pan* into Portuguese and was to include it in his collection *Presença*, published in 1931.

When Hanni and Crowley arrived on 2 September, Pessoa met their ship and booked them into the luxury Hotel de l'Europe. The hotel was up to Crowley's expectations: Lisbon, not surprisingly, was not. Crowley wrote in his diary, 'God once tried to wake up Lisbon – with an earthquake; he gave it up as a bad job.' He was, however, much taken by the wave-cut Boca do Inferno near Cascais, a chasm with a natural arch of rock in which the sea formed a turbulent maelstrom during rough weather.

With Hanni, Crowley's interest in sexual magic was revitalised: or, to be cynical, he enjoyed having sex with a woman a good deal less than half his age when she was inebriated or had taken something from his supply of drugs. Whichever is true, she saw visions which exceeded Crowley's expectations, although she was, he believed, too mystically inexperienced to deal with them. On 13 September, they consumed a great deal of brandy before engaging in a sexual rite which, Crowley noted in his diary, was one of the best he had ever experienced although, afterwards, Hanni sank into a 'very long fit of hysterical sobbing.' This was quite possibly due not only to the drink but also to having been buggered. Three days later, the same thing happened again, which resulted not only in her sobbing but she and Crowley

having a fierce argument in the middle of the night. Other guests complained. The manager came to their room and ordered them to leave. Consequently, the next morning, they went to Estoril, ten miles away.

While Crowley was checking into a hotel at nearby Mont' Estoril, Hanni made her escape and headed back to Lisbon. The following day, Crowley returned to the capital, visiting Pessoa and confiding in him. On 19 September, Crowley found Hanni, who was booked on the next boat bound for Germany. In despair, she had gone to the American consul, L.S. Armstrong, who had told her to go home as soon as possible. Crowley, incensed, tried to persuade her to stay but to no avail. Disappointed, he embarked upon a plan to win her back.

Taking the train to Sintra, Crowley returned to the Boca do Inferno, about eight miles from the town, where he decided to stage a mock suicide. Pessoa was in on it. Close to the chasm, he left a note weighted down by his cigarette case which read, 'I cannot live without you. The other "Boca do Inferno" will get me – it will not be as hot as yours! Hjsos! Tu Li Yu!' This in place, he returned to his hotel, packed his case and set off overland for Germany. Pessoa, meantime, alerted the press to Crowley's apparent disappearance. The local press ran the story first: Sir Aleister Crowley, the famous poet and mystic, was missing. The international wire services were quick to spread the news.

When the story broke, the Portuguese authorities confirmed that Crowley had, in fact, crossed the frontier into Spain, but this did not dampen journalistic ardour. The question was posed – were there *two* Crowleys or did he have a doppelganger? Perhaps, it was suggested, he had been murdered.

Reaching Berlin, the press still believing Crowley to be dead, he sought out Hanni and, convincing her to accuse Armstrong of sexual harassment, wrote a letter for her to sign. However, nothing came of this act of revenge on Crowley's part. Seeking to capitalise further on the 'suicide', Crowley also wrote to Anthony Powell at Duckworth & Company. Purporting to be from Hanni, the letter offered him the story of their affair, ludicrously entitled *My Hymen*. Powell declined the offer.

Speculation over the suicide finally petered out when Crowley appeared on 11 October at the opening of his art exhibition at the Gallery Neumann-Nierendorf in Berlin, the only gallery exhibition of his work to be held during his lifetime. Karl Nierendorf, the exhibition director who owned galleries in Berlin and Cologne and was a leading promoter of the German Expressionists, showed fifty-one works, including landscapes, visionary pictures and portraits. The subjects for the latter ranged from Leah and Mudd to Aldous Huxley, whom Crowley had met and who was now in Berlin. One of the portraits was of an ugly female, entitled *Ether*. Few, if any, of the paintings sold, and most were returned to Britain. The press, being far more liberal than in England, was reasonably kind about the exhibition, but it is not known whether Crowley considered it a success: he should have been pleased as it raised his profile as a serious artist.

Patching things up with Hanni, Crowley announced her to be his latest Scarlet Woman, but their relationship was still very unstable. His diary recorded her fits of melancholia, frequent sobbing, bouts of ill health (exacerbated by dope and brandy) and their not infrequent arguments. Yet Hanni was not the only woman to upset Crowley in Berlin. The other was Germer's American second wife, Cora.

Her bone of contention with Crowley lay in her opinion that he was wasting her husband's money, much of which she had brought with her to their marriage in 1929. She did not believe in Crowley, but that was by the by. If her husband wanted to spend money on magical hogwash, that was his affair: but Crowley was not using the money for magic. He was throwing it away on good living. 'You spend as much in a week on cigars and cognac,' she accused him in a letter, 'as I do in two months on myself personally . . . I consider you a supremely selfish man . . . God Almighty Himself,' she astutely added, 'would not be as arrogant as you have been, and that is one of the causes of all your troubles.'

Crowley's finances, while not vast, were for the time being fairly secure. A trickle of cash came in from occasional journalism. Germer sent him money when he needed it; Yorke

similarly paid him on an ad hoc/need basis. Other followers gave donations, often to their own detriment, and the OTO intermittently forwarded sums. A further source of income was the trust fund administered by Jones, of which Yorke had become a trustee in 1928, the interest from which was shared between Crowley, Rose (while she was alive) and Lola, Crowley frequently badgering Jones to increase his percentage, at Lola's expense. Now in her mid-twenties, she worked as a shop assistant in a London dressmaker's for a wage of seventeen shillings a week: although living in digs, she still gave her address as being her maternal grandmother's house. The trust paid her eighty pounds per annum, which Crowley thought excessive as she was employed and he was not. Jones did not budge.

Lola had little to do with her father. In 1929, she had toyed with meeting Crowley again but, on consulting her uncle, Gerald Kelly, she was advised by him that he could not make her mind up for her: she was old enough now to make her own decisions. He sent her a number of Crowley's books to read. Having leafed through them, she wrote to Gerald Yorke, 'I really haven't time to spare on anyone so rude & conceited! His works are part of him & I'm very sorry for the other part!!' She did not see him.

As Crowley was living it up in Berlin with Hanni, Maria was struggling to exist in London. With Gerald Yorke's help, she rented rooms in Hampstead. He gave her money for food and wrote to Crowley, saying she was penniless, neurotic and verging on the suicidal. She had successfully sought work and had a job until her employer discovered who she was and fired her. This fell on deaf ears. Carter, the Special Branch officer, wrote a friendly letter to Crowley, suggesting he might return to his wife. Crowley considered this impertinent meddling. His answer was to write to Maria suggesting she find a man who would accept her dipsomania and offering her her life back, proposing she file for divorce. To help her, he admitted forty-seven counts of adultery with Hanni since 3 August, apologising for the fact that it was so few but he was travelling a lot and it tired him out. In readiness for any action, Crowley wrote to his London solicitors,

outlining his complaints against Maria. A divorce was imperative for Crowley wanted to marry Hanni, who was pregnant.

Maria was not the only one growing distant from Crowley. He was gradually alienating Regardie, who was finding it both physically and intellectually difficult to keep up with his mercurial master's lifestyle. They began to bicker, then quarrel. Regardie, although he believed in all Crowley taught and dedicated his first book, *The Tree of Life*, to him in 1932, was critical of him for his treatment of others, his selfishness and self-indulgence which, ultimately, he saw undermining the magical work to which they should all have dedicated their lives. He returned to America and, between 1937 and 1940, published a four-volume account of the rituals of the Golden Dawn, thus breaking his oath of secrecy. His intention was honourable, for he had joined a group called the Stella Matutina, believing it could only survive if its secrets were made public.

Gerald Yorke similarly slowly drifted away from Crowley, who accused him, unjustly, of bungling his financial affairs. The rift in their relationship is more than illustrated by Crowley's account of the situation as he saw it. In a deposition made to his solicitors, he wrote that Yorke had come to him in 1928, to 'undergo a course of personal [magical] training. He also urged me to help him to break himself of the habit of masturbation.' On the carbon copy of the document, which Yorke was sent, he tersely added the footnote, 'Nonsense GJY'.

In time, Yorke withdrew both his financial and moral backing. He became interested in Buddhism and turned his attention and wealth to supporting the Dalai Lama, eventually becoming his spokesman in the West and publishing important esoteric Tibetan manuscripts.

Like so many of Crowley's women, Maria and Hanni came to meet tragic fates. Becoming obsessive, Maria was committed to the lunatic asylum at Colney Hatch, north of London, on 16 July 1931, suffering from delusions, manic depression and paranoia. She had been prone to fits ever since Crowley had known her, specialists being called to tend her and hospitalising her in Sevenoaks when they were living at Knockholt. The

asylum authorities thought her delusions bizarre: among such fantasies as believing she was the daughter of the monarch and married to her brother, the Prince of Wales, she kept on insisting that she was the Scarlet Woman of the Beast 666. Clearly, they seem not to have known too much about her recent past. (Yorke was to comment that this delusion was not hers, but Crowley's.) She finally died after many years' incarceration. Soon after Maria was locked away, Hanni left Crowley and later killed herself.

It is fair to say that Crowley drove people to despair yet, where women were concerned, he attracted a certain sort of woman who was already somehow unhinged, neurotic or weak, somehow off the wall before he arrived on the scene to tip them over whatever brink it was upon which they were teetering.

Walking down the Unter den Linden in Berlin in August 1931, Crowley halted to look in a travel agent's window. A woman approached and spoke to him. As of old, a sudden electricity danced between them. The next Scarlet Woman had arrived. Aged thirty-six, Bertha Busch had previously been married but was now single. Crowley was smitten. He called her Bill (or Billy); she called him Darling Boy. A bout of traditional sexual magic established her in her new role and she and Crowley moved in together. They set off on a wild relationship. Bertha was, like Crowley, into masochistic sex, had a fiery temper and was prone to fits of violence. They also vehemently quarrelled, often in public. One day, they had a physical fight in the street. Crowley pinned her against a wall with one hand and set about her with his spare fist. Some passing Nazi Youth members apparently separated them and slapped Crowley about a bit. She also at one stage stabbed Crowley with a kitchen knife. Despite these brawls, Crowley took her everywhere with him, introducing her to all and sundry, including Christopher Isherwood and the poet Stephen Spender.

For a while over the winter of 1931/2, Crowley and Bertha took in a lodger called Gerald Hamilton, a friend of Sir Roger Casement, the Irish republican supporter and British traitor. He experienced the full violence of Crowley's treatment of Bertha. Returning late one night, Hamilton discovered her lying naked

on the floor in a rubble of smashed crockery. The room was freezing, it being mid-winter and the fire having gone out. He woke Crowley, who came in and gave the recumbent figure a hefty kick. Bertha came to, leapt up and started fighting like a cat Crowley bellowed for Hamilton to help tie her up, but he refused and called a doctor, who sedated her. On another occasion, he came in to find her trussed up with a note from Crowley instructing that she not be untied.

As their lodger, Hamilton provided more than just his share of the rent. He was a German spy, a communist and, as Casement had been, a Sinn Fein supporter. He introduced Crowley to all the leading communists in Berlin, including the influential Ernst Thalmann, whom Crowley tried to convert from communism to the Law of Thelema. There was, however, another side to Crowley's friendship with Hamilton. Crowley was paid fifty pounds by Lt-Col. Carter to report on Hamilton's activities. Throughout the 1930s, Crowley worked sporadically for the British secret service, supplying information on communists, German nationalists, the Nazis and occult fraternities involved with any of them, such as the Gestapo. At last, Crowley was a bona fide spy, if only on a part-time basis.

At the same time, Hamilton was reporting on Crowley's activities to the Nazis, who were interested in German occult, freemasonic and similar fringe organisations: they already perceived them as potentially subversive and were beginning to exterminate or incarcerate particularly homosexuals and freemasons in concentration camps, of which the world was then ignorant.

Inevitably, the time came for Crowley to walk out on Bertha and return to London, where she followed him to find that no entreaties could win him back. Germer was pleased at the break up, for her place in Crowley's life had considerably annoyed him. As the Scarlet Woman, she was theoretically of the same magical rank as Crowley, but Germer would not accept this. To him, she was just Crowley's latest passion, not a real Scarlet Woman, and therefore due neither his worship not respect. Crowley dismissed Germer's intransigence, as he

saw it: a wedge had been driven between him and his patron.

Once back in London, Crowley felt stifled. His books did not sell there; his paintings were ignored; he was an anachronism. He felt he needed to raise his public profile again, but how to go about it was beyond him. What was more, he needed money. Funds from Germer were starting to dry up, partly because Germer was beginning to distance himself from Crowley and partly because of the economic depression in America, where Germer and Cora held their investments, and rampant inflation in Germany. Yorke was also starting to withhold payments. The answer to the dilemma finally dawned on Crowley: he would sue the next time he was libelled.

Constable & Company was a small, respectable publishing firm which, in 1932, published Nina Hamnett's autobiography, *Laughing Torso*. Crowley knew it was coming as Hamnett had contacted him while writing it to assure him that the book contained nothing contentious about him, although he was mentioned a good deal in it. She had, of course, known Crowley for twenty years, had briefly been an A∴A∴ member, tried to warn Loveday and Betty May against going to Cefalù, and had even given Leah Hirsig ten shillings in Paris in 1924 to tide her over. However, she always kept Crowley at arm's length.

Receiving a copy of the book, Crowley decided he had been libelled. He sought an injunction against the book and a libel writ was served in September 1932. This was not the end of his litigious activity, however. Deliberately seeking slights, he also sued a bookseller called Gray. In the window of his bookshop in Praed Street, Gray displayed a copy of *Moonchild* with a card reading 'Aleister Crowley's first novel *The Diary of a Drug Fiend* was withdrawn from circulation after an attack in the sensational press'. This was false: Collins had not withdrawn the book, merely not reprinted it. The case went to court on 10 May 1933. The court found in Crowley's favour and awarded him fifty pounds in damages plus costs. The judge determined, 'There was not the smallest ground for suggesting that any book Mr Crowley had written was indecent or improper. Mr Gray wanted the public

to believe that the book to which the label was attached was an indecent book.' Spurred on by this success, Crowley sued another bookseller but settled out of court for twenty pounds.

These victories boded well for the case against Constable, but Crowley was to find taking on an established publisher was to be a different matter altogether.

As the time for the trial drew nearer, lawyers acting for Constable, their printers (by a strange twist of irony, the Chiswick Press) and Nina Hamnett proposed an out-of-court settlement, but Crowley, despite his lawyers advising acceptance, refused it.

Crowley's libel was based upon just three sentences on page 173 of *Laughing Torso* which, referring to the villa at Cefalù, ran: 'He [Crowley] was supposed to practise Black Magic there, and one day a baby was said to have disappeared mysteriously. There was also a goat there. This all pointed to Black Magic, so people said, and the inhabitants of the village were frightened of him.' It was hardly a screaming libel and nothing was stated categorically. What Crowley objected to was the inference that he had carried out black magical rituals, which implied he was a Satanist.

Crowley's lawyers were none too confident and started to trawl his past for weaknesses upon which the defendants could rely to swing a jury. When his lawyer read *White Stains*, he warned Crowley that if the other side got hold of a copy of the book, his case was doomed to failure. The court need only see the sexual perversity in it to damn Crowley's character beyond repair.

Case 1932 C. No. 3651, Crowley *vs.* Constable & Co. and others, began in the King's Bench Division of the High Court, before Mr Justice Swift, on 10 April 1934. Crowley was represented by J.P. Eddy. Malcolm Hilbery, KC, appeared for Constable & Company, with Martin O'Connor representing Nina Hamnett. The defence placed before the court was a plea of justification. The hearing lasted four days.

From the start, Crowley portrayed himself as an almost philanthropic white magician. Eddy presented a balanced account of Crowley's magic and clarified the true meaning of Crowley's

maxim 'Do what thou wilt shall be the whole of the Law', and all seemed to be going reasonably well for Crowley until he was called to the witness box.

Parts of the trial, now known as the 'Laughing Torso libel', have gone down in legal history, not because of any precedents set but for the sheer entertainment value provided.

Hilbery's cross-examination took Crowley's veracity apart. As with the press, Crowley was way out of his depth in the face of an experienced King's Counsel, and misread the entire mood of the proceedings. Some of the exchanges verged on circus:

Hilbery — *Did you take to yourself the designation of The Beast 666?*
Crowley: — *Yes.*
Hilbery — *Do you call yourself the Master Therion?*
Crowley: — *Yes.*
Hilbery: — *What does Therion mean?*
Crowley: — *Great wild beast.*
Hilbery. — *Do these titles convey a fair impression of your practice and outlook on life?*
Crowley — *The Beast 666 only means sunlight. You can call me Little Sunshine.*

The public gallery rippled with laughter. Crowley was enjoying his spot in the limelight, making the most of it, unaware that he was blowing his case away with a mixture of facetiousness, fawning and farce. Hilbery's cross-examination continued with sections of Crowley's autobiography being read aloud. They reached the part dealing with Crowley's flat in Chancery Lane, in the heart of London's legal district, in which he had stayed with Allan Bennett.

Hilbery (reading): — The presiding genius of this place was a human skeleton . . .
Crowley (interjecting). — *Yes. Millikin and Lawley, £5.* [Millikin and

Lawley were well-known medical equipment suppliers.]

Hilbery (reading) . . . which I fed from time to time with blood, small birds and the like. *Was that true?*

Crowley: *Yes.*

Hilbery: *That was White Magic, was it?*

Crowley: *It was a very scientific experiment*

Hilbery (reading) The idea was to give it life, but I never got further than causing the bones to become covered with a viscous slime . . .

Crowley (interjecting again): *I expect that was the soot of London.*

Hilbery had determined to show Crowley as a black magician and purveyor of filth: he read out some of Crowley's bluer poetry from *Clouds without Water* and *White Stains*, setting it up as immoral filth. He also undermined him by wondering aloud in court why he had not sued Beaverbrook and Bottomley for far greater libels than this one. When he had finished, Crowley's reputation was in shreds.

O'Connor was set the task of proving he was a charlatan.

O'Connor *I understand you say you are a gentleman who sees visions. Is that right?*

Crowley: *Sees visions. Yes.*

At that, O'Connor seemed to turn tack. Crowley must have expected more on the subject of visions and magic but O'Connor was wily and had other plans: he wanted both to ridicule Crowley and prove he was a liar, cheat and fraud. He had also done his homework, and asked Crowley if he owed twenty-four pounds to Rosa Lewis, the owner of the Cavendish Hotel, famous as a society hostess nicknamed the

Duchess of Duke Street. That she frequently failed to chase up debts incurred by fashionable clients, to such an extent that she herself declared 'People only come to the Cavendish to bounce cheques and pee', was conveniently overlooked.

O'Connor: *Were you summoned for the amount of your bill by Mrs Lewis in the Westminster County Court in April 1933?*
Crowley: *I have no information on the subject.*
O'Connor: *What?*
Crowley: *I do not know People do all sorts of things like that and I never hear of them.*
O'Connor *That is peculiar and I will tell you why. County court summonses have to be served personally.*
Crowley *Yes, but I do not know. Someone gives me a paper and I put it in my pocket. I think no more about it. A fellow gave me a judgment summons only yesterday. It was a very nice shade of yellow.*

Crowley still failed to grasp the gravity of the situation and the fact that he was being led to the slaughter. O'Connor started to enjoy the drama he was creating.

O'Connor *You say you have visions. Conjure up a vision of when you are going to pay Mrs Lewis the £24 . . .*
Crowley *If I am bound to pay her I shall pay her*
O'Connor: *When?*
Crowley: *When I can.*

O'Connor now went for the jugular.

O'Connor *You said yesterday as a result of early experiments you invoked certain forces with the result that some people were attacked by unseen assailants. That is right, is it not?*
Crowley: *Yes.*
O'Connor *Will you try your magic now on Mr Hilbery?*

Crowley: *I would not attack anybody.*
O'Connor *Is that because you are too considerate or because you are an impostor pretending to do things which you cannot do?*

O'Connor changed tack again, encouraged by the judge not to turn his court into a magical temple.

O'Connor *You said, 'On a later occasion I succeeded in rendering myself invisible.' Would you like to try that on? You appreciate that if you do I shall not denounce you as an impostor?*
Crowley *You can denounce me as anything you like It will not alter the truth.*

Somewhat late in the day, the judge asked Crowley to define white and black magic. Crowley explained that magic was the science or art of causing change to occur in conformation with will. If the will was righteous, it was white magic, if perverse then black.

The defence called Betty May as a witness. The goings-on at Cefalù were detailed, down to the sacrifice of the cat. Eddy cross-examined her. She was now Betty May Sedgewick and he asked her how many times she had been married, to which she replied, 'I think four times.' He then produced two letters which purportedly showed that she was only appearing to make money out of the trial. One of these was to her solicitors. She immediately declared them stolen and the judge ruled them inadmissible. (Later, on 24 July, Crowley appeared at the Old Bailey wearing tails and a black silk top hat. He was tried for receiving stolen goods – two letters worth 7½ pence – convicted, bound over for two years and charged fifty guineas costs.)

Although Crowley had done so much harm to his own case, his lawyers could have carried out a damage limitation exercise with their own witnesses, had they had any. John Sullivan, J.F.C. Fuller and J.D. Beresford all declined to testify. Only

Karl Germer took the stand. Eddy tried his best to sway the jury but the judge's summing up was biased. What had set out as a fairly minor libel case ended up as a trial of Crowley himself. The parameters of the case were vastly overreached, the judge failing to direct the jury towards the libel or curb the defence lawyers' legal bloodlust. Eddy was too lightweight and Crowley was himself.

The jury, which did not even bother to retire, found against Crowley and awarded the defendants their costs. Crowley had thoroughly enjoyed the whole process, the publicity of it all. He was once again front-page news. In his diary, his self-delusion was evident: 'Case violated by collapse of Swift and Nina. General joy – the consternation of Constable & Co.' Yet he had lost.

Immediately, Crowley's lawyers set in motion an appeal. The case was heard in November, but although the appeal judges agreed that the libel may have existed and were critical of Judge Swift, they concluded that Crowley did not deserve even nominal damages because the case was one no jury could reasonably have decided, and so there was no miscarriage of justice. In short, it was considered virtually impossible to libel a man of Crowley's reputation, a judgment which echoed on down the years: in 1956, when Nina Hamnett died in somewhat questionable circumstances, probably a suicide, it was said that Crowley had cast a spell on her after the trial.

At the time of the trial, Bertha Busch no longer holding the position, Crowley had appointed a new Scarlet Woman called Pearl Brooksmith. Pearl was thirty five and a widow whom Crowley first met in August 1933. She helped fund a new edition of *The Book of the Law* and generally contributed towards Crowley's living expenses at a time when Yorke and Germer were growing disillusioned with him. In return, he gave her the copyright in the Simon Iff stories. When, in due course, Pearl started to suffer from hallucinations, she was consigned to a mental hospital, from which she wrote pleading letters for Crowley to release her. He, having moved on in her absence, ignored them.

The continued attraction Crowley exerted on women is

puzzling. He was well past his prime, fat and generally unappealing. His breath reeked so strongly of ether it was said you could smell him before he entered the room. Crowley put his attraction down to a daily application of 'Ruthvah, the Perfume of Immortality', a mixture of civet, musk and ambergris. It produced a heady, but barely perceptible, scent which, it was said, caused both horses and women to whinny at his approach.

One would think Crowley would have learned a lesson from the Laughing Torso case, but he did not. In 1935, he sued the *Sunday Referee* for breach of contract. Hayter Preston, the literary editor, had suffered a momentary lapse of judgment and, feeling sorry for Crowley, had commissioned an article from him entitled, 'My Search for the Absolute'. When Mark Goulden, the paper's editor, read it, he summoned Preston to his office and told him bluntly that they did not require any more such rubbish. Crowley arrived in the newspaper's offices with more material: the article published was only the first of a series. Goulden rejected the lot. Crowley said he had a contract for a series and went to his lawyers. He lost but, in his eyes, only in the short term. Many years later, when the *Sunday Referee* closed down, Crowley sent Goulden a postcard bearing the message, 'So you didn't win after all.'

Despite the fact that Crowley lost these cases, he never paid a penny in costs or damages. On 14 December 1934, a bankruptcy notice was issued. It was served on 2 January 1935.

The creditor that issued the notice was B.S. Rhodes, Ltd. of New Bond Street: they were moneylenders and Crowley was into them for £140, consisting of a loan of £126 plus five per cent per annum interest. He was officially declared bankrupt on 14 February, the Public Examination of Bankruptcy set for May Day.

When proceedings got under way, the full list of creditors was astounding. In all, there were thirty-eight unsecured and ten partly secured creditors, the latter being those who possessed some of Crowley's material assets such as books, manuscripts and personal effects. Apart from the moneylenders,

Crowley listed Pearl Brooksmith (£888), Constable & Company (£846: court costs due), Rogers & Co., Ltd, tailors of New Burlington Street (£535), Block, Grey & Block, wine merchants (£170), a moneylender called Watson Turner (£500), Forsyte, Kerman & Phillips, solicitors (£500) and Count Eric Lewenhaupt, gentleman, of 72 Ladbroke Grove, London W11, who had loaned Crowley £175. Smaller sums were owed to the Waldorf, Cavendish and Savoy hotels, a number of restaurants and other tailors, Foyles Bookshop, Dolland & Aitchison, the opticians, three doctors, three tobacconists, two masseurs, a shirtmaker, a bootmaker, a hosier and a dentist. Total liabilities came to £4,695 8s. 1d. Crowley declared, 'I do not consider that I have been extravagant.'

As for his assets, Crowley believed he was worth £15,000, although the official statement prefaces this with the note, '1 Doubtful Book debt'. This sum was what Crowley, who had served Gerald Yorke with a writ for negligence in looking after his financial affairs, believed he was due on the grounds that he could have earned this much had Yorke not managed his affairs. He also admitted that he had had little to do with his own finances. 'I am,' he stated belligerently in a memorandum to the bankruptcy report, 'the author of some of the noblest prose and poetry with which the English language has ever been enriched, and I cannot also have the talents of an accountant.'

On the day of the hearing, the assistant official receiver, Mr Bruce Park, asked Crowley for his full name. He gave it as Edward Alexander Crowley. Park asked what other names he used, to which Crowley replied there were hundreds.

During the hearing, all Crowley's financial life was laid bare. Under questioning, Crowley was not so flippant as he had been in court, and did not play to the gallery. After a long examination, the receiver came to the conclusion that Crowley had indeed been extravagant, living at three times the level of his income. It was also stated that he had not the tiniest piece of evidence to prove that Yorke had been remiss in his responsibilities as Crowley's financial keeper, and nothing came of the writ served on him.

It was not until 1939 that the creditors received a first and final dividend of two pence in the pound: in other words, they received a 120th of what they were owed. A further paltry sum was paid out in 1950, three years after Crowley's death, to those creditors who were still extant.

As for Crowley, he was doomed to live the remainder of his life as an undischarged bankrupt.

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The Man Who Laughs Last . . .

In 1935, Crowley was sixty. At an age when most men are looking forward to retirement, he could only anticipate a bleak, impecunious future. He might have become a god, yet he had not achieved his life's ambitions. The Law of Thelema was known to only a small coterie of followers, most of whom lived outside Britain. His reputation as a writer was non-existent, even his best poetry ignored. As a mountaineer, he was no longer remembered except for the tragedy of the Kanchenjunga expedition. Even his magical achievements were ridiculed in a society becoming increasingly technologically and scientifically educated and rational-thinking. As far as the public was concerned, he was a has been even as the world's most evil man. For all this, Crowley was as determined as ever. As Charles Cammell was to note, his spirit was undefeated and his mind as active as ever. He was, nevertheless, a little cowed by his experiences in both the law and bankruptcy courts.

Almost all Crowley's income had come by way of donations from the OTO, gifts from friends and, to a very small extent, payments from the trust fund Jones administered. Crowley believed it was his due to receive money. He believed, without equivocation, that it was his right. He was involved in the Great Work, was a leader among men, and therefore people should contribute to his wellbeing and the publication of his writings. In the past, when he had been rich, he had been generous with his wealth – guests to Boleskine attested to it – if not with actual cash. Money meaning little to him, other than its purchasing power, he saw it as a commodity to be given, either to him

or, if he had it, by him. Now he was poor, he expected to be presented with an income, just as he had expected his cheques to arrive on time from home when he was a student.

As with his finances, Crowley's health was also in poor shape. He suffered from constipation, asthma and bronchitis in the winter, was addicted to ether, frequently indulged in other drugs, drank brandy and smoked both cigarettes and cigars but had, finally, successfully weaned himself off heroin. In its place, he took the German asthma drug which friends in the OTO in Berlin sent him and used an early type of nebuliser to assist his breathing, which one of his landlords had at first assumed was a dictaphone with a mouthpiece. His teeth were stained and going rotten: on 28 February 1937, he broke one of his Serpent's Kiss teeth, his upper left incisor, when slipping in a Turkish bath.

Incredibly, despite his ill health and increasingly dissolute appearance, he still attracted women, with whom he conducted sexual magical rites, often aimed at improving his finances. Some of the women were whores but many, such as Pearl Brooksmith, were not, living with him for short periods, looking after him and boosting his income until he tired of them or they of him. Many of these women were of a bohemian bent, divorcees looking for a bit of excitement, desperate spinsters or women who were, to be charitable, eccentric.

One in particular, however, did not fit this mould at all, save in her being a bohemian. Born in 1915, her name was Deirdre Patricia O'Doherty. Preferring to be called Deirdre, but referred to as 'the girl Pat' by Crowley's circle of intimates, she was the granddaughter of T.C. Gotch, the famous artist of the early Newlyn School. Her mother having abandoned her after the death in the Great War of her father, an officer in the Irish Guards, she was raised by Gotch and his wife. She was first introduced to Crowley by Robin Thynne, whom Crowley knew through the Mandrake Press, who moved in artistic circles, was a friend of T.C. Gotch and was by now a literary agent living at Trevithal, in the village of Paul, a mile south of Newlyn. Deirdre, although only nineteen, was the much older Thynne's mistress. They had a

long-standing love affair which ended only with his untimely death.

In April 1934, her grandparents decided that Deirdre should go to London to lodge with a relative: life in remote Newlyn was hardly opening up her horizons, although she was familiar with many of the leading artists of the day, and it was felt that she should see more of the world. The relative with whom she stayed in London was a High Court judge, Lord Justice Slesser. He thought, for her amusement, that she might like to watch a trial in progress, suggesting she attend an interesting one currently being heard. It was none other than the Laughing Torso case. She went to the court, sitting in the public gallery, and was much taken by Crowley. After the case ended, she was again introduced to him by Thynne. Crowley took a liking to her. She was young, pretty, well spoken and even aristocratic in bearing, spirited, happy-go-lucky and lively – a forerunner of a sixties hippie girl. Still, nothing happened between them; Crowley was living with Pearl Brooksmith and Deirdre was besotted with Thynne. Most unusually for Crowley, their relationship was platonic.

In 1935, however, Thynne died and Deirdre, distraught at her loss, travelled abroad, not returning to Britain until the spring of 1936, when she went to London with the intention of studying medicine. She met Crowley again and entered into an intense yet still platonic friendship with him. One evening, however, as she and Crowley were walking to Pearl Brooksmith's flat, he put his arm around her and asked if she would bear his child. She agreed.

Crowley's request is curious. He usually just took any obliging woman he fancied. He had not previously slept with Deirdre: indeed, he had not even kissed her except perhaps in a social context. He was impressed by her intelligence, and she was charismatic, but this is not to say he would have wanted her specifically to give him a child. Was it that he wanted a child in his old age, something to cling to, to have hope in? A child, even an illegitimate one, would have given him an anchor in his last years. Did he want a son, someone to continue his line, perhaps carry on the Great Work? His previous children had all

been daughters, although there is a distinct possibility that he had a son by Sylvia Sullivan. In a list of lovers compiled by Crowley, there is an asterisk marked next to Ninette Shumway (Astarte Lulu's mother) and Sylvia Sullivan, with an addendum, 'and her eldest son born in wedlock.' The third asterisk is next to Deirdre O'Doherty's name, although he refers to her as Pat McAlpine, her subsequent married name. Or was it simply that he was lonely?

One also wonders why she acquiesced. Was it that she, too, was lonely after Thynne's death? Quite possibly her motives were guided by her loving children and feeling that it was time to bear one herself: in later life, she not only had a number of other children but also adopted many, running her own kind of children's home or orphanage. She was, throughout her life, feisty and of a powerful character, but beneath her outward strength resided a soft-hearted woman, and she may well have felt sorry for Crowley.

The conception was, according to Deirdre, difficult. Crowley had to reduce his drug and booze intake in order to manage an erection. Before each session, he carried out a magical rite. After Deirdre became pregnant, she did not move in with Crowley. They were never to cohabit, although she did often stay with him in London. Crowley's son was born in Northumberland, at noon on 2 May, 1937: they called him Randall Gair, although Crowley later nicknamed him Aleister Ataturk.

Through the second half of the 1930s, Crowley lived comparatively quietly, moving from apartment to apartment in London, into cheaper or more expensive properties as his financial situation allowed. His abode fluctuated between something as grim as a slum tenement in Paddington Green to apartments or rooms in Chelsea, Bloomsbury, Kensington, Wimbledon and the highly fashionable Jermyn Street. He seems never to have been evicted for non-payment of rent, but he could not have been an ideal tenant, as Alan Burnett Rae, who was Crowley's landlord in Welbeck Street during 1936, remembered in his pamphlet *Aleister Crowley – A Memoir of 666*. The occupants of the other apartments in the building protested vociferously at

the stench of Crowley's incense and the noise emanating from his flat, of his arguing with women who screamed and shouted back at him. Burnett-Rae met Crowley every day, 'for the bootless purpose of asking for the rent or remonstrating with him for disturbing the peace of the house.' It must have been a relief when he moved on.

Crowley's life was, compared to the past, tranquil. He read, carried out magical rites, studied the tarot, entertained visitors and played chess. Some of the nation's best chess players would meet at his flat for a game. He was, from time to time, invited out to dinner with friends and acquaintances, although some of these were reluctant invitations, for people were always afraid that Crowley might try to touch them for a loan. At such functions he was a witty conversationalist and good company. He was even invited to literary functions: at a Foyles Literary Lunch in 1939, he met John Cowper Powys, who was the after dinner speaker. Powys bought Crowley a bottle of wine, the entire contents of which he drank during the short speech.

The dinner parties Crowley gave were famous or notorious, depending upon the cast-iron qualities or otherwise of the guests' palates. His steaks were renowned, served with a good burgundy (his favourite wines were a Le Corton and a Richebourg, preferably a '29) and cooked to perfection. But Crowley also threw curry parties. His curries were exceedingly hot and he enjoyed watching his sweating guests down pints of water to quench their burning mouths. Crowley added extra chillies and other spices to his own plate, claiming he had learned about such food in the Orient, where it was eaten to promote perspiration, which therefore cooled the body by evaporation. It was at a curry party that Charles Cammell, then working as a journalist, established his close relationship with Crowley. Cammell consumed his serving without demur, washing it down with chilled vodka. When he asked for a second helping, their friendship was firmed, although it was to last only a few years.

Crowley was able to drink anything and never become obviously intoxicated. He invented his own cocktails, an example of a recipe being one measure each of cognac, Kirsch and absinthe

with a liberal dash of Tabasco and ether to taste, shaken with ice. The 'Kubla Khan No. 2', mentioned in *The Diary of a Drug Fiend*, was also the name of another Crowley concoction made of gin, vermouth and a potion Crowley would dramatically pour from a small black bottle marked 'Poison', the contents of which were laudanum.

Tales of Crowley and alcohol abound, apocryphal and otherwise. The story goes that he once asked a friend called Eileen Bigland if he could lodge with her for a short while to write. During his stay, Crowley enquired if he could accompany her when she went shopping daily in a nearby town. While she shopped, he would wander off, meeting her later. Crowley left after a fortnight. Once he was gone, his hostess's daughter, reporting that the lavatory cistern was not working properly, found fourteen empty gin bottles hidden in it. The local vintner's bill showed where Crowley had bought it, on credit against Eileen Bigland's name.

Another account concerned the critic and writer Maurice Richardson, whom Crowley invited for lunch in 1939 after taking umbrage at a comment Richardson had made in a review. Arriving at Crowley's lodging, he was let in by a Scotswoman called Kathy. After being shown a photo of Crowley with his son at the seaside near Mousehole, in Cornwall, Richardson sat down to lobster bisque and roast duck served with white Chianti followed by brandy and cigars. As he was leaving, he apologised for the remark in the review: he had, in criticising another writer's book, said the author reminded him 'of a more agreeable Aleister Crowley'. Crowley took out his fountain pen and asked Richardson if he'd write a little note of apology. Richardson said he would but he was too drunk to write. In that case, Crowley said, they'd meet again for lunch the following week. It was not until later Richardson realised that, had he written the note, he would have been admitting liability for the slur, leaving himself open to a writ. Richardson and Crowley did meet the next week, Richardson avoiding the apology again and inviting Crowley to lunch at L'Escargot, the famous restaurant in Soho's Dean Street. Before the meal, at which Crowley ate three dozen snails, a wild

duck pie and downed a bottle of burgundy, he drank three triple absinthes. He followed the meal with several brandies and black Mexican cigars.

On Crowley's sixty-second birthday in 1937, he threw a sixtieth birthday party for himself starting at El Vino's in Vine Street, off Piccadilly. After drinks, the party moved on to the Café Royal, where Crowley tried to sell one guest, an elderly Austrian baroness, a bottle of 'Ruthvah'. The food was excellent and the wines, including bottles of Montrachet and Richebourg, Veuve Clicquot champagne and fine cognac, top quality. When it came time to pay the bill, Crowley's current woman settled it with a cheque, as she carried no money, the cheque having to be made payable to the Café Royal and excluding tips for the staff. Consequently, all the guests, Crowley excepted, contributed in cash towards the waiters' gratuities. According to a history of the Café Royal, Crowley held another party there a short while later. The menu was even better than previously, the meal served in a private function room and preceded by vodka drunk *à la Russe*. As the meal came to an end and the brandy was poured, Crowley excused himself and left the room. It was assumed he was going to relieve himself, which, in a manner of speaking, he was. He went to the cloakroom, collected his hat and coat, walked out through the columned portico into Regent Street, hailed a taxi and drove off. The Café Royal was left with a loss of a hundred pounds. Crowley was not welcomed there again.

He may have lived on the borders of impecuniousness, but Crowley still cut a dash. He habitually wore unmodish rough tweed jackets and plus fours, large floppy bow ties, silk shirts and hand-knitted stockings with silver buckles at his knees and on his shoes. Sometimes, he kept his socks up with silver Tibetan bangles lined with tiny bells. He also wore a waistcoat, hat, gloves and overcoat regardless of the weather, and carried either a malacca cane or an African walking stick with a carved demon's head on it. (Crowley claimed another of his walking sticks was made out of a rhinoceros's penis, stretched by weights and dried in the sun.) It is reliably reported that he still never wore underclothes.

Over the years, Crowley shed many of his friends. Some he alienated, some escaped. New friends were slow to come to him, put off by his reputation. Yet despite this, he still maintained a close coterie of people who found him an interesting companion, drawn to him by his erudition, his intelligence and considerable intellect, his chess playing, his sense of humour and, under his brash and often avaricious exterior, his basic honesty. He possessed a rich tone of voice, an extraordinary vocabulary (so finely tuned that he very rarely resorted to common expletives) and a maddening penchant for obtuse word games and phraseology. For all his sins, Crowley was never one to hide anything: what you saw with him was what you got. He made no pretence to be other than what he was, or what he thought himself to be. There was one proviso. One did not draw him out on matters magical. Conversely, Crowley kept off the subject as well. Louis Wilkinson, Crowley's close friend from 1907 until his death, never discussed sex or magic with him, regarding him as a powerful intellectual with somewhat bizarre religious ideas.

Crowley's wit was prodigious, very quick, sharp and caustic. On one occasion, when Theodore Dreiser, lost for the correct word for a swan chick, asked, 'What is it? What would you call a young swan?', Crowley promptly answered, 'Why not call him Alfred?' At another time, when a lady friend enquired of Crowley which would be the best young ladies' college to which to send her daughter, he, with all seriousness, replied, 'Radclyffe Hall.' This was not a ladies' college, like Lady Margaret Hall at Oxford, but the name of the lesbian author of *The Well of Loneliness*. On being asked how one could get a good night's sleep in Russia without being bitten by bedbugs, Crowley's recommendation was, 'Shift the frontier.' As the letter to his mother, on his wedding to Rose, adequately illustrated, Crowley's humour would fit in well with the best of modern comedy.

Yet beyond all this was Crowley's charisma. There was something indefinable about him that drew people. Francis Toye, Gerald Kelly's cousin, summed Crowley up as 'a genius gone wrong' with 'a remarkable talent for Browningesque verse,

a soaring imagination, and a sense of humour altogether exceptional. Indeed, in retrospect, his sense of humour stands out as his most striking attribute.' Augustus John, who met Crowley off and on over the years, was charmed by his company once he had divested himself of what John referred to as his 'Cagliostro pose.' Crowley, he declared, 'in course of time . . . developed into a very likeable old gentleman' who possessed 'a good deal more than the stock-in-trade of a charlatan, and perhaps only lacked good taste.' Even some of those friends Crowley drove away remained loyal to him. Gerald Yorke, who in his latter years always referred to Crowley as The Old Sinner, swore an oath to preserve Crowley's documents and not only kept his word but collected all he could until his own death in 1983, maintaining an archive of books, manuscripts and even Crowley's clothes, regalia and bronze magical staff, always ready to open it to students of Crowley. It is now the seminal collection held by the Warburg Institute in London. His affection for Crowley never diminished and, even after they were estranged, Yorke occasionally contributed to Crowley's income should he hear he was down on his luck, and occasionally bankrolled publications. Israel Regardie similarly supported Crowley after their split. Highly critical of the injustices he perceived in John Symonds' biased biography of Crowley, he wrote a lengthy, balanced study entitled *The Eye in the Triangle*, and edited much of Crowley's work for posthumous publication.

Whether one remained a friend of Crowley's or chose to leave him, one never forgot the impact he made or the influence he could exercise. Much has been said about his exerting a power over all whom he met. Even those who disliked him admitted to his considerable charismatic presence and ability to capture attention. He possessed a sort of magnetism which was hard to resist and resulted in most people taking a positive decision as to what they thought of him, which could range or metamorphose from unbridled adulation through admiration to animosity and utter abhorrence. This magnetism was the basis of many of the stories about Crowley's supposedly controlling

others by telepathy or even hypnosis. He was said to have had hypnotic eyes with which he could level a quite unnerving stare, yet both Yorke and Regardie refuted this. The latter described Crowley's eyes as 'warm . . . , small but friendly and alive – rather inclined to fix themselves in one position and bore in – but hardly hypnotic in any sense of the word.' He thought those who considered Crowley's eyes to have been mesmeric must have been projecting their own particular psychological problems on to him. Looking into Crowley's face, one sensed that one was being confronted by authority, but that was not to say one was being hypnotised. Whatever the case, once one had met Crowley, one never forgot him.

Much of Crowley's time was still spent on the affairs of the OTO, of which he was titular head. He kept in touch with groups around the world, accepting new initiates, although the OTO in Britain was minute and the A∴A∴ had long been dormant. When Crowley left for America in 1914, A∴A∴ members had greatly reduced their activity, which was brought to an abrupt halt in 1917 as the result of the police raid on the headquarters in Regent Street. All the A∴A∴ regalia and documents were removed 'for examination' during the raid but never returned, and subsequent attempts to revive the society were thwarted by the anti Crowley press campaigns. As a leading occultist, Crowley was well known and consequently subjected to correspondence from the curious and the eccentric. An example from his mailbag reads:

> *When I was three weeks old . I was lying in my cradle when a hard bowler hat fell off a hat rack and hit me on the temple and rendered me unconscious The effect of it was that I upset my whole nervous system Since I can remember, I have suffered from excessive perspiration of the hands and feet, extreme nervousness and extreme shyness, and when I reached the age of about 14 I began to suffer excessive seminal losses . I have very great ideals and have a strong desire to do good in the world, for instance putting an end to the White Slave Traffic*

This was all heading towards a request for instruction in developing psychic powers.

To supplement his income, Crowley dreamed up several money-raising schemes. One was to open a Black Magic Restaurant, but this came to nothing. Had it materialised, it might have become the world's first theme restaurant: once again, Crowley's ideas were well ahead of his time. Another idea, his Elixir of Life pills, made of chalk, sugar, gum arabic and – allegedly – Crowley's semen (one ejaculation apparently provided for hundreds of pills), did actually sell. More successful still, however, was a thirteen week course of bodily and sexual rejuvenation which Crowley called Amrita, after the ambrosia of the gods. The course cost twenty-five guineas per week.

In 1937, Crowley published *The Equinox of the Gods*. It consisted of *The Book of the Law* and an outline of Crowley's magical life. Funded primarily by Gerald Yorke, Israel Regardie and OTO members, it was lavishly printed, embossed and bound in buckram. At 6.22 a.m. on Boxing Day, as the sun moved into Capricorn, Crowley and Yorke gathered by Cleopatra's Needle on the Embankment in London with an Indian, a Jew, a Malay and an African, all of them collected from a trawl of public houses the night before. Crowley proclaimed that he was giving *The Book of the Law* to the representative races of the world, then presented each person with a copy of the new publication. This done, they all went their separate ways.

This was not all Crowley published. Two years later, he delivered a lecture series in London on yoga, bringing the lecture notes out as a substantial pamphlet full of, as Cammell put it, 'that union of erudition and satire of which he was capable.' At the winter solstice of 1939, Crowley produced *Temperance, A Tract for the Times*. Printed to resemble an expensive restaurant wine list, bound with a gold cord, it was a collection of rowdy drinking songs dedicated to Lady Astor, who was famously teetotal. Later, during the austere year of 1942, he published *The Fun of the Fair*, the advertising flier reading, 'the book will be as expensive and nice as this prospectus is cheap and nasty.' Even in the darkest year of the Second World War, Crowley had not lost

his mischievous sense of humour and whimsical self-mockery.

While Crowley was managing to keep himself going in London, life for Karl Germer in Germany was very difficult. On 13 February 1935, he was arrested by the Gestapo in a clampdown on a number of occult societies, including the OTO. The reason cited on the arrest warrant was that he was disseminating Crowley's teachings: Crowley was named on the warrant as a senior freemason. Cora, who was in America, and Martha Kuntzel requested that the US ambassador in Berlin intervene. He refused. Germer was held in solitary confinement at the Columbia concentration camp, tortured in the Alexanderplatz holding centre in Berlin, then incarcerated in Esterwegen concentration camp until August before, inexplicably, he was released and fled to England, moving on to Dublin, where he worked for several years as an engineer. In May 1940, having moved to Belgium, he was arrested as a German and deported to France, where he was interned before, in 1941, emigrating to the USA. The following year, Cora died and Germer married a wealthy Viennese pianist and music teacher, Sascha Ernestine André. However, his persecution did not end there. In America, Germer and his third wife were targeted by the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) as Nazi sympathisers, possibly secret agents. They became so paranoid that they stopped speaking at home, fearing that their house was bugged. The FBI showed interest in Germer because of his links with Crowley, whom FBI operatives considered to be the brains behind him, and if he was a Nazi spy) his field controller. Memories of Crowley's pro-German journalism over twenty years before had not faded. Until Crowley's death, Germer was the Grand Treasurer of the OTO, then, when Crowley died, he became overall head, remaining so until his own death from prostate cancer in 1962. It goes without saying that Germer's occasional imprisonment upset Crowley's level of income from OTO sources, although, after 1942, Germer in part used his new wife's money to support Crowley.

Germer may have been regarded as an enemy of the Nazi state but the same could not be said of Martha Kuntzel. She considered Crowley the mystical world leader and Hitler the temporal one. She sent Hitler an annotated German edition of *The Book of the Law*, knowing of his deep interest in the

occult. Both Crowley and Germer came for a while to be convinced that Hitler was her magical son, his Nazi philosophy containing many elements of the Law of Thelema. Certainly, there are obvious similarities between Crowley's writings and Hitler's conversations, as printed in Rauschning's *Hitler Speaks*. These do not prove, as Crowley's detractors would have it, that he influenced Hitler. It was more a case of Hitler's own philosophy being based upon the same occult principles as those of Crowley. When war was declared, Martha Kuntzel renounced her admiration for Hitler, but not before it had been of use: it is highly possible that she was behind Germer's unexpected release from the concentration camp. As for Crowley's opinion of Hitler, he was under no illusions. He had visited the Third Reich on a number of occasions and considered the Fuhrer to be a magician who misinterpreted the occult and, therefore, brought about his own destruction.

Crowley's role in the Second World War has been speculated upon ever since his death and, until secret government files are declassified, it will remain that way. However, enough information is in the public domain to draw some concrete conclusions.

Central to Crowley's involvement in the war was Tom Driberg, who was friendly with the novelist Dennis Wheatley. He introduced Wheatley, who was interested in the occult, to Crowley, and they met on a number of occasions both before and during the war: it was through these meetings that Wheatley began to write the occult novels for which he became famous. Wheatley in turn introduced Crowley to Maxwell Knight.

Maxwell Knight, who also wrote novels, was a senior MI5 officer and spymaster: he was, in part, the basis for Ian Fleming's 'M' in the James Bond stories. In the immediate pre-war years, he established a select, secretive group of agents in the heart of MI5, called Department B5(b). Nicknamed Knight's Black Agents, they were counter-subversives working as moles in the Communist Party in Britain, Mosley's British Union of Fascists, far-left trades unions and the like. Driberg was the main mole in the communist ranks, although he was later to turn double agent.

Owing to his contacts, multilingual skills and general intellect, Knight considered that Crowley might be a viable MI5 subversive, only deciding against recruiting him because of his eccentricities, prominence and the fact that the Germans by now knew he had been reporting to the British government on communists in Berlin. He was, in espionage terminology, compromised, and with at best only a shallow cover. Nevertheless, Crowley moved in the twilit world of secret intelligence and was friendly with agents.

Sometime after Robin Thynne's death, Crowley introduced Deirdre O'Doherty to James McAlpine, a secret service operative who, when war broke out, was stationed in the Balkans as a Section D agent in the Secret Intelligence Service (SIS). Leaving Britain before the war to travel with her eighty-six-year-old grandmother and son, Deirdre met McAlpine in Greece and married him in Palestine. Upon the Nazi invasion of Greece, she moved to the Middle East and on to Egypt: McAlpine was subsequently killed. Meanwhile, Deirdre McAlpine (as she now was) undertook to work as a cipher clerk for the Special Operations Executive (SOE) in Cairo.

It is not so surprising that Crowley was peripherally involved in intelligence work when one considers the part played by the occult in the history of the British secret service. As far back as Elizabethan times, John Dee worked as an agent and was an expert code-writer and breaker. In World War I, Britain's enemies even believed the secret service possessed occult powers, so good was their cryptography and intelligence-gathering.

By the mid-1930s, it was well known in intelligence circles that the Nazi hierarchy was secretly interested in the occult. Hitler was fascinated by it, to such an extent that he instigated a secret archaeological team to search Europe for the Holy Grail, believing it would give him the occult powers of God. Goebbels, Reichsminister for propaganda and national enlightenment, used astrology as a propaganda tool and maintained a secret department studying the occult. Himmler, head of the SS and Gestapo, was fascinated by the myth of Siegfried, the Teutonic hero who defeated the Romans in the Teutoburger Wald, and put great

faith in the power of black magic. The Gestapo hierarchy even maintained their own black magical lodges.

With such interest in the occult in Germany, it followed that the British paid considerable attention to it, especially astrology. One of those central to the work in Britain was Sefton Delmer, a friend of Ian Fleming and one-time Berlin correspondent for the *Daily Express*. Working under him was a Hungarian astrologer, Louis De Wohl, an SOE agent attached to a department of psychological warfare. De Wohl attempted to predict what Hitler might do next, and what his astrologers would be telling him, and reported it to the War Office. In addition, De Wohl thought inaccurate astrological readings could be used in counter intelligence, and so fake predictions were made to the German detriment and disseminated in occupied Europe by the SOE.

Within weeks of war being declared, Crowley was contacted by the secret services. On 10 September 1939, he was sent a terse note which read: 'The Director of Naval Intelligence presents his compliments and would be glad if you could find it convenient to call at the Admiralty for an interview. It would be appreciated if you will be good enough to communicate with Commander C.J.M. Lang, Royal Navy, Naval Intelligence Division, Admiralty, Telephone: Whitehall 9000, Ext. 484, in order to arrange a suitable time.' At the foot of the missive, Crowley wrote, 'Better ring up Mr Frost Ext. 46 for an interview.' Clearly, he had his contacts but, that notwithstanding, in fact it seems they had no permanent post to offer him.

Ian Fleming, assistant to Vice Admiral John Godfrey, Director of Naval Intelligence, went with others to Maxwell Knight with a plan to entice a leading Nazi to Britain. It was suggested it be let known that there was an influential group in Britain ready to overthrow Churchill and negotiate peace. A likely candidate for entrapment was Rudolf Hess, who, with Hermann Goring, was Hitler's deputy. Hess, who was keen to broker a peace with Britain to avoid Germany having to attack Russia, was a keen student of both astrology and the occult. Knight considered the plan viable and thought of using Crowley, well known as an occultist both in Britain and in Germany, as a go-between.

The plan was put into action and an astrologer was briefed, then infiltrated into Germany and Hess's occult circle. At the same time, Hess was to learn that the Duke of Hamilton would be prepared to meet with him to negotiate a peace. Hess consulted his astrologer, who informed him that 10 May 1941 was a propitious date upon which to act. On the night of 10 May, Hess flew himself across the North Sea and arrived in Scotland where, on being arrested, he asked to be taken to see the Duke. Hess's 'defection' was regarded as a major propaganda coup.

With Hess imprisoned at Trent Park, a country estate near Enfield north of London, it was mooted by Ian Fleming that Crowley might interview him to learn the importance or otherwise of the occult and astrology to the Nazi hierarchy. Tracking Crowley down to lodgings in Torquay, Fleming had no difficulty in persuading him to assist, although whether this was done by mail or in person is not known. Crowley was keen to help and wrote to this effect to Fleming at the War Office. Godfrey, however, rejected Crowley's offer.

According to John Pearson, Ian Fleming's biographer, Fleming treasured Crowley's note and, many years later, may have used Crowley as the basis for Le Chiffre, the villain in *Casino Royale*, the first James Bond story. Le Chiffre is a sadist, addicted to inhaling benzedrine (rather than ether) and with a craving for women: he was also overweight, ugly and, like Crowley, addressed other men as 'dear boy.' Such close parallels suggest that Fleming and Crowley had met.

Whether Crowley actively took part in what was loosely termed psychic warfare or not is uncertain, although rumours persist to that effect. Certainly, witches tried to use their magical powers to halt an invasion of Britain and psychically neutralise Nazi evil, and it was rumoured Crowley took part in one ceremony held in Ashdown Forest. After the war, both Russia and the USA conducted experiments in psychokinesis, attempting to discover if psychic power had a place in military intelligence. This work was an extension of secret research conducted during the early 1940s, when both Britain and Germany tried to

use psychic influences to deflect aerial attacks and scramble radar signals.

Whatever role Crowley played, the Nazis knew about him. The infamous radio propagandist William Joyce (aka Lord Haw-Haw), jeering at nationwide church services held during the Blitz, suggested that Crowley might preside over a Black Mass in Westminster Abbey with more efficacious results.

During the war, Crowley worked upon and completed his last major work, *The Book of Thoth*, an interpretation of the tarot as Crowley had first come across it in the teaching of the Golden Dawn, but vastly expanded by his own philosophy of the Law of Thelema, subsequent study and experience. Tarot cards were very important to Crowley, especially the major arcana or 'trump' cards. He wrote, 'I have satisfied myself that these twenty-two cards compose a complete system of hieroglyphs representing the total energies of the universe.' So vital did he consider them, he decided to design a new pack of the cards, incorporating the principles of *The Book of the Law*.

It would not have been beyond Crowley's artistic ability to do this himself, but he seldom painted now and it was a major undertaking, for the full pack consisted of seventy-eight cards. He needed a fellow artist to assist or be guided by him, and he found one in Lady Frieda Harris.

Two years younger than Crowley, she was the wife of Sir Percy Alfred Harris, the Liberal Chief Whip and Member of Parliament for Market Harborough, famous for being known in parliamentary circles as 'The Housemaid' on account of his always 'emptying the Chamber' (pot) with his mind-numbing speeches: he, like Crowley, was a Trinity man, and they had been up at Cambridge together. A well-known eccentric society hostess, Lady Harris maintained a studio on the top floor of 3 Devonshire Terrace, Marylebone. Here she entertained, often with costume parties, the literary, artistic and theatrical glitterati of the day. She had known Crowley since 1937 when he initiated her into the A∴A∴, despite the fact that it was inactive.

Starting the following year, they began to co-operate on designing the new tarot pack. It took until 1943. The forty

ordinary suit number cards were painted with abstract designs, while the court cards bore symbolic pictures of the princess, prince, queen and king. The major arcana cards were completely redesigned. Each painting measured 10½ by 16½ inches and was exquisitely executed in full but subtle colours in considerable detail. Crowley provided rough sketches, overseeing every painting, often criticising and reshaping the image: some he insisted Lady Harris paint over and over again until they were just right. She worked from his drawings, notes and previous tarot card packs, some dating back centuries, adding her own interpretations and driven, as she told Crowley, by her own Holy Guardian Angel. As with Leila Waddell and her music, and Victor Neuburg and his poetry, Crowley believed the power of his charisma brought out the best in Frieda Harris' art, awakening her otherwise semi-dormant talents.

Despite wartime paper shortages, *The Book of Thoth* was published as a limited edition in 1944, printed by the Chiswick Press on hand-made paper which did not come under wartime supply restrictions. The binding was done by Sangorski & Sutcliffe, Ltd, considered one of the best bookbinders in Europe. It was illegal to publish fliers advertising new books but a flier was produced by claiming that the edition was Vol. III, No. 5 of *The Equinox*, a periodical publication and therefore exempt. The actual tarot pack was not published until 1969, when a poor reproduction was made. In 1977, Gerald Yorke arranged for all the pictures to be rephotographed, the OTO having published or licensed sets of them ever since. They are now the most sought-after design of tarot cards in the world.

Eccentrics injured by bowler hats aside, Crowley's postbag was often full of letters from people requesting serious advice on spiritual or occult subjects. He always responded and, towards the end of the war, decided to collect his responses into a book entitled *Aleister Explains Everything*. He never completed the project, although Germer did bring out eighty of the letters in 1954 under the title *Magick without Tears*. In the winter of 1946/7, Crowley published his last book. It was *Olla – An Anthology of Sixty Years of Song*, a collection of his

poetry, the cover by Frieda Harris and the frontispiece by Augustus John.

Throughout the war years Crowley, in common with many people, was fairly itinerant. During the first year of the conflict, he lived in Petersham Road, in the suburban London borough of Richmond, in a house overlooking the Thames. Here he hoped he might be safe from the bombing of the city and docklands, for he believed he was a specific Luftwaffe target on account of his occult powers. From here, he moved to a Queen Anne house on nearby Richmond Green. In Richmond, one of his neighbours was Montague Summers, an expert on Restoration drama and the celebrated author of *The History of Witchcraft and Demonology*. He and Crowley got on well, Summers considering him 'one of the few original and really interesting men of our age.'

When the Blitz began in earnest, Crowley left London. Not only the bombs drove him out. His health was failing, his asthma aggravated by the city smoke and river mist. Cammell paying his fare, he moved to lodgings in Torquay, where his health improved, although a bout of pneumonia laid him low. As the bombing of London lessened, he moved back to the city, taking the ground floor flat at 93 Jermyn Street. Then, in 1944, as the flying bombs started to rain on London, Crowley, now sixty-nine years old, left London once more, for good. His departure was prompted by a bomb exploding at the rear of his lodgings, showering glass on to his bed. Had he been sleeping at the time, he would have been fatally lacerated.

At first, Crowley stayed at the Bell Inn in Aston Clinton, just outside Aylesbury in Buckinghamshire. He liked the place. The food was good and the ambience pleasant but, despite frequently being visited by friends and admirers, he was bored by the company and asked Louis Wilkinson to look for other lodgings. Oliver Wilkinson, Louis's son, who was an actor in repertory theatre performing in Hastings, asked around the town. No landlady wanted to take in Crowley. Eventually, Wilkinson approached one of his fellow actors, who had recently started an 'intellectual guest house', the guests having

to be interesting people: he welcomed the opportunity to bring in such a personality as Crowley.

The guest house-cum-residential hotel was called Netherwood. It was a large Regency house set in four acres of trees on The Ridge, on the outskirts of town; Crowley moved in on 17 January 1945. The proprietor had a wry, Crowleyian sense of humour. The house rules included the following: 'Guests are requested not to tease the Ghosts. Breakfast will be served at 9am to the survivors of the Night. The Hastings Borough Cemetery is five minutes' walk away (ten minutes if carrying body), but only one minute as the Ghost flies. Guests are requested not to cut down bodies from trees. The Office has a certain amount of used clothing for sale, the property of guests who have no longer any use for earthly raiment.'

Crowley lived in one bed-sitting room with a bed, a chest of drawers, a writing table, some bookshelves and a washbasin. Upon the walls were hung several of his paintings, to the mixed awe and horror of visitors, including his own portrait of himself as a kind of Chinese seer. An empty tin served as his ashtray. Meals were taken in a communal dining room but Crowley did not generally like the other residents and ate in his own room. He described them in a letter as 'the most appalling crowd of alleged human beings that have ever been got together in one place.' He rarely went out but, when he did, it was to the local chess club or to visit Oliver Wilkinson, who lived with his family in the area. His health gradually deteriorated, his body weakening as the months passed as a result of his asthma and the fact that he was once more addicted to heroin. During the war, his supply of the German asthma drug had dried up and he had returned to prescribed heroin, which he now injected.

In the austere postwar years, Crowley had little money. His main source of income was the Agape Lodge of the OTO in Pasadena, California. Germer, living in New York, also sent him a percentage of OTO initiation fees. Not only did these followers send money: they also sent Crowley tobacco, sweets and other little luxuries unobtainable in Britain, which was under strict rationing laws. In gratitude for his having found

him a place in Netherwood. Crowley sent Oliver Wilkinson some rare, expensive cigars received from America. Wilkinson, not appreciating their worth, told Crowley he had smoked them without realising what they were: Crowley, with typical generosity, sent him more to savour.

The Agape Lodge was founded in 1915 by Wilfred T. Smith, an initiate of Charles Stansfeld Jones' Vancouver branch, who broke away from Jones. With Crowley's approval and Jane Wolfe's assistance, he set up a lodge in Hollywood in the 1930s: after many years living in Britain, Jane Wolfe had returned to the USA in poor health but lived to the age of eighty three, dying in Glendale, California, in 1958. The lodge was later taken over, at Crowley's behest, by John W. Parsons (whose wife Smith was said to have seduced), who moved it to Pasadena. Parsons, who was in his twenties, was a leading rocket fuel chemist and aerospace engineer and one of the founders of the California Institute of Technology's famous Jet Propulsion Laboratory. For several years, the lodge ran smoothly until Parsons started a search for a Scarlet Woman who would bear a moonchild. Aiding him in this was a fellow scientist, L. Ron Hubbard, the originator of dianetics and the Church of Scientology.

When he heard of this, Crowley was aghast and wrote to Germer, 'Apparently Parsons or Hubbard or somebody is producing a Moonchild. I get fairly frantic when I contemplate the idiocy of these louts.' Hubbard seems to have been the moving force behind the plan. Parsons was in his control, to such an extent that he put his life savings of $17,000 in a joint account with Hubbard, who contributed only about $1,000. This raised Crowley's suspicions. 'It seems to me [he wrote to Germer] on the information of our brethren in California that Parsons has got an illumination in which he has lost all his personal independence . . . Apparently it is the ordinary confidence trick.' Crowley's reservation seems to have been justified. Hubbard and Parsons fell out, the former apparently half emptying the joint bank account to buy a yacht and running off with Parson's wife. For all their animosity, Parsons maintained to Crowley that Hubbard was a genuine magical neophyte, 'the most Thelemic

person I have ever met and is in complete accord with our own principles. He is also interested in establishing the New Aeon.' His viewpoint changed somewhat when the OTO came under FBI scrutiny after, it is thought, being tipped off by Hubbard. Hubbard claimed he had been involved because he had been trying to break up 'this evil black magic group' and succeeded: despite this apparent animosity he was, in his Philadelphia doctorate course lectures recorded on tape in 1952, to recommend students to read *Magick in Theory and Practice* by 'the late Aleister Crowley, my very good friend', and, according to his son, Hubbard frequently read Crowley's works, believing in the possibilities of magical memory. Parsons was killed in 1951 in a laboratory explosion at the Jet Propulsion Laboratory, accidentally dropping a container of volatile fulminate of mercury.

By early 1946, Crowley was beginning to wonder what would become of the OTO after his death. Crowley had appointed Karl Germer to be his successor on his release from the concentration camp, but Germer was sixty-one years old and Crowley was worried that he would not chose an appropriate heir. There was, however, someone in Crowley's mind to succeed Germer. He was an American army captain called Grady McMurtry, who had been posted to Britain during the war and visited Crowley on a number of occasions. After the war, McMurtry returned to America. An intelligent and educated man, he enrolled at the University of California at Berkeley, gaining a bachelor's degree in philosophy. During the Korean War, he served once more in the US Army before returning to Berkeley to complete a master's degree in political theory. He subsequently became a management analyst for the US State Department of Labor in California and Washington, DC.

In 1943, Crowley made McMurtry Sovereign Grand Inspector of the OTO with the magical name Hymenaeus Alpha: then, in 1946, Crowley gave him a letter of authorisation allowing him to exercise emergency control of the order should the OTO in California start to degenerate, and to take charge of its work. In June 1947, Crowley delegated to McMurtry his authority as head of the OTO throughout the USA on Germer's death.

Germer approved both these moves, which placed McMurtry in a virtually unassailable position, for no one else had been given Crowley's express authorisation or delegation.

When Crowley eventually died, what he had feared came to pass. Germer let things slide and, by the time of his death, had failed to name a successor. A Swiss OTO member, Hermann Metzger, claimed the position but was generally rejected. Another grab for the throne was made by one of Germer's initiates in California, Marcelo Ramos Motta. After a spate of arguments, court cases and expulsions, McMurtry stepped in and, having sought the support of Gerald Yorke, Israel Regardie and many OTO initiates, implemented the emergency procedures. Under him, the administration of the OTO was restructured, its affairs put on a sound footing. By the time McMurtry died in 1985, the order was flourishing once more. His successor, Hymenaeus Beta, runs the global organisation to this day.

As the months passed in Netherwood, Crowley's health gradually declined. He was injecting as much as eleven grains of heroin a day: one-eighth of a grain was sufficient to kill a non addict. Yet his mind was still alert, resulting in his often being bored, his boredom relieved mainly by writing letters and receiving visitors. Journalists and those curious to meet him came, as well as Gerald Yorke, Louis Wilkinson, Lady Frieda Harris and Grady McMurtry, and Deirdre McAlpine and Crowley's son, who had taken his deceased stepfather's surname but had also adopted his natural father's name of Aleister.

After the war, when Deirdre McAlpine returned to Britain, widowed and nearly penniless, she contacted Crowley, who had himself been searching for information as to what had become of her. He sent her what money he could spare, as well as a share of the chocolates he had been sent from California. They corresponded frequently, Crowley addressing her as 'Deirdre, my best beloved', signing himself 'Ever your own, my dearest, Aleister.' She often visited him at Netherwood with their son

Crowley was moved by their coming back into his life, alleviating the loneliness he must have felt in the guest house.

He wrote to the boy, addressing him as 'My Dear Son' and saying, 'First of all let me tell you how intensely happy your re-appearance has made me; I feel that I must devote a great deal of my time to watching over your career.' In his way, Crowley was proud of his son and wanted the best for him.

When they called upon him, Crowley asked Deirdre to read the lad some of his poetry so the child could comprehend what rhythm was, commented upon his good behaviour and stressed to him the need to always be truthful. It was Crowley's wish he be well educated at Gordonstoun, the public school at Elgin in Scotland founded by the famous Dr Kurt Hahn, whom Deirdre knew, but he had his concerns. 'What is objectionable about any school,' he wrote in a letter to Deirdre, 'until he arrives at Gordonstoun age, is that we do not wish him corrupted by enforced association with a lot of low class sub human animals.' No doubt Crowley harboured memories of Champneys and Malvern College. In 1947, Crowley charged Germer and the OTO with the care of his son after his death, which undertaking they duly performed, starting his formal education in 1948 at Wester Elchies, the Gordonstoun preparatory school, and, later, taking him to America.

In old age, Crowley mellowed, losing much of his vain arrogance. When Grady McMurtry first met him, he took to addressing Crowley as Master until, one day, Crowley looked over his shoulder and said, 'I don't see any masters here.' His physical appearance changed. He became gaunt as a result of his heroin addiction, copious intake of brandy and the fact that he ate next to nothing, consuming mostly biscuits and milk.

An accurate depiction of Crowley in the last year of his life was given by James Laver, whom Crowley had first met in the 1920s. The author of a book about Nostradamus, Laver was invited to visit Crowley after he had read the book. He described Crowley as shrunken and thin, with a straggling beard and a face the colour of grey mud. His tweed jacket and plus-fours hung loosely about him, his shirtsleeves spattered with tiny spots of blood. During their meeting, Crowley drank brandy

and continuously smoked cigarettes or a pipe. After a while, without hardly breaking his conversation, Crowley rolled up his sleeve, picked up a syringe, dissolved a tiny scarlet pill in it and injected himself. His face suddenly lost its pallor and his brown eyes sparkled. 'From time to time [Laver recalled] he turned them upon me, and I began to understand the hypnotic fascination he must once have possessed.'

A less flattering description was recorded by Professor E.M. Butler, Fellow of German at Newnham College, Cambridge, and the author of *The Myth of the Magus*. She interviewed Crowley in the course of researching the book. He was, she considered, oppressive, boring, egotistical and narrow-minded, a seedy little man with thick spectacles and a yellow addict's face, a tear lingering in the corner of one eye. His voice was thin and unpleasant. Crowley also scared the lights out of her. In answer to a question on the occult, he vociferously informed her, 'Magic is not *a* way of life, it is *the* way of life.'

Arguably Crowley's most important visitor was a young man called John Symonds. He was living in the house at 84 Boundary Road, Hampstead, in which Neuburg had died, and had become interested in the man who had purportedly cursed the former resident of the building. On sending Crowley a telegram, he was invited to Hastings to lunch. Symonds accepted, taking with him the astrologer Rupert Gleadow. Symonds described Crowley on their first meeting as of 'medium height, slightly bent, and clad in an old style plus-four suit with silver buckles below the knee. In his eyes was a puzzled, pained look. He had a thin, goatee beard and a moustache, and his head, in spite of tufts of hair on the sides, seemed no more than a skull . . . "Do what thou wilt shall be the whole of the Law," he intoned in a nasal, fussy voice. "The Wickedest Man in the World" looked rather exhausted . . .'

Conversation was at first strained, but when Gleadow started talking about astrology, Crowley perked up. They talked about magic until it was time for lunch, when Symonds and Gleadow took theirs in the dining room, with Crowley going upstairs. After lunch, Crowley produced a bottle of brandy, which they

drank as they talked about the end of the world and various theories and predictions about it. This conversation may have been somewhat one-sided: whenever he was asked about the end of the world, Crowley usually replied, with some finality, that he could not see what all the fuss was about regarding the apocalypse, because the world had already been destroyed by fire in 1904.

Over the coming months, Symonds and Crowley corresponded and met on a number of occasions. It was not long before Crowley appointed Symonds his literary executor. According to Israel Regardie, this showed a lack of perspicacity on Crowley's part. 'This man's [Symonds'] basic insincerity [Regardie wrote], demonstrated vividly in the first two or three chapters of the contemptuous treatment of *The Magick of Aleister Crowley* by John Symonds, seemed to have been wholly lost on Crowley. This book shows conclusively that the author's contact with Crowley was with tongue in cheek throughout, that he managed successfully to pull the wool over the dying man's eyes.' Regardie's doubts seemed to be echoed by Maurice Collis, who had a meeting with Symonds in 1950, when the latter was researching his book on Crowley, *The Great Beast*. Collis wrote in his diary. 'He [Symonds] said that he hoped to make a name and fortune over Crowley.'

By the summer of 1947, Crowley's health was deteriorating fast. He needed full time nursing now but could not afford the fees, although he had about £450 in a box under his bed. This, however, he refused to touch, saying it was money sent from America for the exclusive use of the OTO. As the summer moved into autumn, Crowley was so ill he was almost permanently under the effects of his medicines, his speech slurred and his thoughts disjointed. He spent long periods just sitting in his room, in silence. The last words he ever said to Louis Wilkinson were, 'I am sorry you have wasted your time in visiting a log.'

Deirdre often came to visit Crowley, to sit and talk with him or just to be near him, to give him company if he wanted it. Their son frequently came with her. On 29 November, she

wrote to Louis Wilkinson, her letter headed, 'Netherwood, The Ridge, Hastings'. It read:

> *Dear Mr Wilkinson, They suggested in the office that I should let you know we were back at Netherwood but I think I should have written anyway because Aleister seems so very far from well, worse, at least, than I've ever seen him, & I wondered if you knew & if, perhaps you'd be coming down soon I don't feel he is getting the constant care & attention that a person as ill as he is needs, & yet I don't see how I can interfere over it without upsetting people all round & possibly making things worse If only you were here and might be able to think something out It's the pluresy on top of everything else that worries me, & he does look so frightfully ill — & he is definitely much weaker Forgive my writing in pencil, my pen is in Aleister's room & as he is, I hope, sleeping, I can't get it Yours sincerely Deirdre.*

At last, Crowley had someone who genuinely loved him despite all his faults, who gave him, if briefly, the comfort and companionship of a family life.

As the end neared, Crowley was not afraid. Death was for him a rebirth into something new. He made no attempt to recant, to regret his life and his magick: he only regretted that he had not achieved as much as he had wanted.

Crowley died in Netherwood on 1 December 1947 of chronic bronchitis aggravated by pleurisy, and myocardiac degeneration. He was seventy-two. Deirdre McAlpine was with him at his side: his ten year-old son had left the room a short while before. It has always been assumed, as Crowley slipped into unconsciousness, that tears flowed down his cheeks and his last words were, 'I am perplexed.' Yet this is hearsay. The last words Deirdre ever heard him utter were, 'Sometimes, I hate myself.'

At the moment Crowley took his last breath, the curtains hanging in the window of his room suddenly billowed in. Deirdre believed it was a sign of the gods accepting him into their company.

Shortly after his death, as Crowley lay alone in his room, somebody came in and stole his gold watch.

The following day, Crowley's physician in London, Dr William Brown Thomson, was found dead in the bath at his Mayfair apartment. He had been systematically reducing Crowley's heroin dose, ceasing his prescriptions altogether in September. Crowley had, it was said, cursed him for this decision. Thomson's death was due to natural, not occult, causes, yet the word went out that his demise was his patient's revenge. The posthumous Crowley legend was already beginning.

At different times during his life, Crowley had left instructions as to how his funeral should be conducted. He once expressed the wish that his body be interred in the room over the Great Gate of Trinity College, Cambridge, which would then be sealed like a vault. Before the Kanchenjunga expedition, he had requested he be embalmed, dressed in his magical robes and placed in a secret vault specifically prepared for him, his magical jewels and vellum editions of all his works beside him. He further suggested at other times he be buried in Westminster Abbey (appropriately, in Poets' Corner), or cremated with his ashes in an urn placed on top of the Rocca di Cefalù or on a broad ledge halfway up the rock face behind the pond at Boleskine. However, in his final will, drawn up within months of his death, he simply requested that Louis Wilkinson read the *Hymn to Pan*, *The Book of the Law*, and the Collects and the Anthem from his Gnostic Mass over his coffin.

His funeral was held at the public crematorium in Brighton at 2.45 p.m. on 5 December: in the order of service, the date of his birth was misprinted as 18 October. It was a cold winter's day. Reporters and journalists excepted, about a dozen people attended, including Deirdre McAlpine, Louis Wilkinson, Lady Frieda Harris, Gerald Yorke and a friend of Norman Mudd called Gilbert Bayley. After Wilkinson read from Crowley's works in accordance with his wishes, Deirdre McAlpine stepped forward and, as the coffin was moved away to be consumed by fire, threw flowers upon the lid.

The service, while hardly Christian, was dignified and proper, yet it raised a veritable storm of controversy. A local newspaper said it had been a black mass. Enraged people wrote to their local town councillors until the Brighton civic authorities issued a statement assuring the public that precautions would be taken to prevent a similar event in the future. Crowley had had the last laugh.

The reading of his work at his funeral was not Crowley's only final request. A year to the day after his death, a memorial dinner was held in his honour, organised by Lady Frieda Harris. The invitation letter began, 'A Curry party has been arranged in accordance with Aleister Crowley's wish on the anniversary of his death, on the evening of December 1 at 7.30p.m. at the New Delhi Durbar Restaurant, 179, Hampstead Road, N.W.1 The cost of the dinner works out at 12/6d per head, inclusive of extras . . .' After the meal, the party went on to Gerald Yorke's home at 5 Montague Square.

Not everyone kept fond memories of Crowley. Lola, who was now happily married, had grown to detest her father and had, for years, had nothing to do with him. When, the year after Crowley's death, Gerald Kelly wrote to Louis Wilkinson (who had been named co-executor of Crowley's literary estate with Symonds), he pointed out how Crowley had distorted the facts in his autohagiography to suit his vanity ('and what a childish snob how insensitive') and maintained that Crowley had been a bore of whom one quickly grew tired. Yet in his defence, he was to say, 'you must try and envisage him the good looking young undergraduate I met in Cambridge, and who still persisted in the Crowley who lived opposite me in Paris.'

What happened to the cinerary urn containing Crowley's ashes is something of a mystery and, with his sense of humour, one he would no doubt have relished. It was sent to Karl Germer in Hampton, New Jersey. He buried it under a tall pine tree in the garden of his house. When Germer came to move to California, he planned to take the ashes with him, to rebury them in, as he put it in a letter, 'a decent spot in the West', possibly a beautiful plot of land Wilfred T.

Smith owned on the coast near Malibu. He went to dig the urn up yet, despite searching all around the tree, could not locate it.

Most people believe Crowley's remains lie there still – as Gerald Yorke might have affectionately put it, an old sinner in a new world.

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